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A New Reality

Getting Remote Learning Right

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A New Reality: Getting Remote Learning Right

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Editors' Note

This spring, school leaders and educators across the world entered what the superintendent of one major district has called "truly uncharted waters." The spread of the novel coronavirus—and the subsequent shutdown of many school systems—has created a new reality in K–12 education, one in which many educators and families have had to make a rapid, unplanned-for transition to remote (or distance) learning and in which issues of student equity and well-being loom larger than ever.

This special issue of *Educational Leadership* was designed to provide guidance and spark reflection, discussion, and problem-solving on these issues. Bringing together a range of expert educator voices, the issue spotlights technological, infrastructural, and instructional best practices for remote learning in difficult circumstances. At the same time, it explores the social-emotional, cognitive, and resource challenges that many students and families are facing today, in effect providing a whole-child lens on distance-learning practices.

Of course, as our contributors make clear, there are no easy answers in a time like this. But we hope this special issue serves as a basis for impactful collaboration and decision-making as schools move forward.

—The Editors

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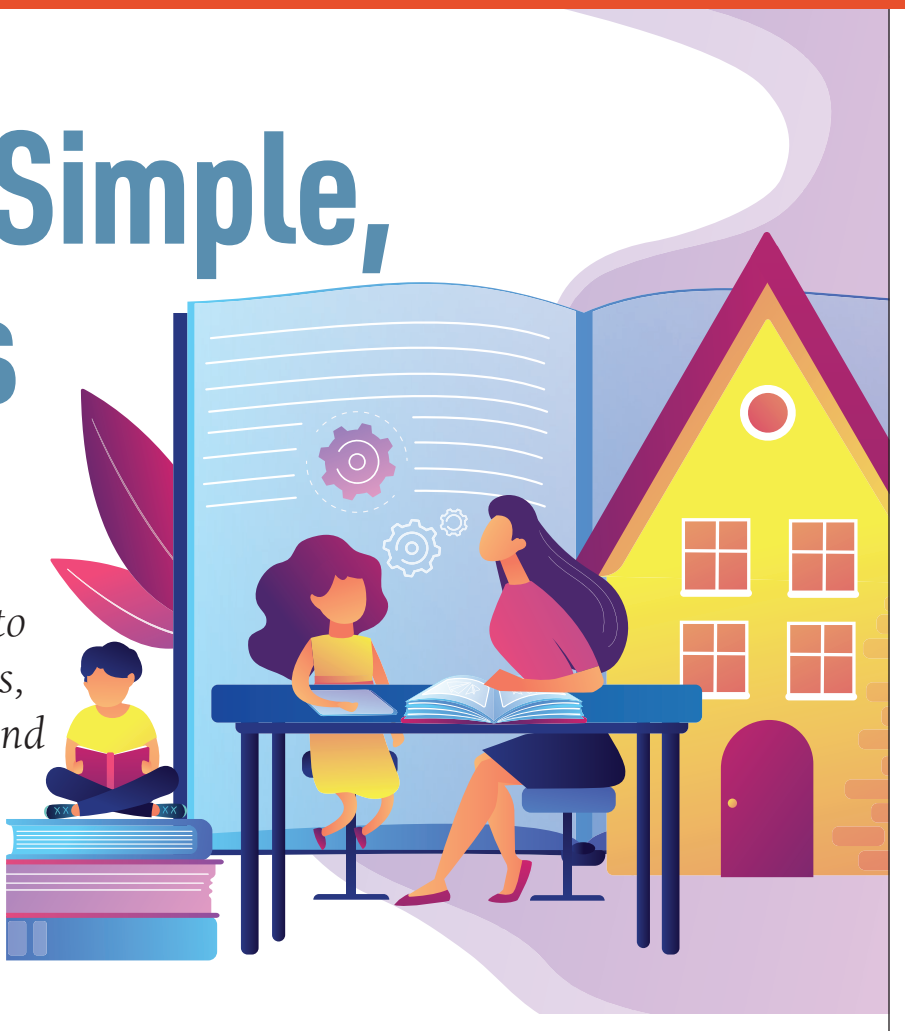
Keep It Simple, Schools

To ensure equity and engagement in remote learning, schools need to zero in on key priorities, including enrichment and manageable projects.



Justin Reich

On March 26, Massachusetts' Education Commissioner Jeff Riley released a thoughtful pathway forward for remote learning during a pandemic (2020). The plan has three main principles. First, *care for students*. Prioritize keeping students fed and sheltered, supporting emotional needs and mental health, and attending to the most vulnerable students. Second, *create opportunities for projects and enrichment*. The state recommends that schools focus on student interests, family projects, and reinforcing previously taught skills over addressing new material or learning objectives. Third, *set realistic expectations*. The state suggests that schools aim for about one-half of a typical school day of learning time, with a combination of student-driven learning, educator-recommended activities, teacher check-ins, physical activity, arts, and play. For credit-bearing classes that do continue, the state recommends switching to credit/no-credit grading for work.

My intuition is that whether by fiat, by recommendation, or by necessity, most school districts across the country will adopt similar models that focus on projects and enrichment over trying to maintain a regular schedule of classes. The vast majority of American schools are not set up to rapidly switch to remote, online learning in the midst of a pandemic.

Many families lack access to devices and broadband internet, and even families that do have a computer at home often don't have one for each school-age child. Meanwhile, many teachers are not familiar with digital learning pedagogies, and some districts don't have the curriculum resources prepared to support remote teaching. As growing economic uncertainty raises anxiety and causes hardship in families and the pandemic potentially causes widespread illness among students and teachers, the barriers to remote education will grow.

Even in the best of circumstances, effective distance learning can be difficult to accomplish. Research suggests that young people have great capacity for online learning, but much less facility and persistence with online *schooling*. Young people are remarkably facile at using the internet to learn how to cook a new recipe, beat a level in a video game, or explore their interests (Ito et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the research on pursuing formal schooling and courses online provides much less cause for optimism.

Over the last decade, researchers have identified a kind of "online penalty" in terms of grades and dropout rates when students switch from face-to-face to online learning (Dynarski, 2018). High achieving, affluent learners tend to be minimally affected by this penalty: students who do fine anywhere will do fine online. But most students do worse in online courses, and the online penalty is more severe for vulnerable and struggling students—students with low prior achievement, ethnic and racial minorities, and younger students. These are the same groups of students most likely to be hit hard by COVID-19 and a possible economic recession. In the best of circumstances, we'd expect these students to struggle in a transition to online learning, and we can expect yawning gaps in outcomes to emerge during a pandemic. As a result, a focus on projects and enrichment is probably not only the most equitable way forward for the weeks and months ahead, but likely the most effective for keeping students learning and engaged in school.

Even in the best of circumstances, effective distance learning can be difficult to accomplish. Schools now pivoting to online learning can learn from the experiences of virtual schools already in operation.

Key Questions to Address for Remote Learning

For schools and districts that want to adopt Massachusetts' proposed remote learning model—one based on projects and enrichment—there are four big questions to address:

How will you publish good projects and enrichment activities?

Schools now pivoting to online learning can learn from the experiences of virtual schools already in operation. Full-time virtual schools typically operate with an asynchronous learning model that depends upon parents and caregivers acting as coaches. Schools publish curriculum materials, parents help their students proceed through these materials, and teachers provide assessment of student work and coaching to students and parents. At younger ages, more of this happens with students working under the direct supervision of parents (a tremendous challenge during a pandemic), but as students get older, there is a greater expectation for independence and synchronous learning with teachers and peers. To simplify, virtual schools do two things: they publish curriculum materials and they coach students and families. For regular public schools and district to pivot to distance learning, they'll need to become good at the same two things.

For students to pursue projects and enrichment, schools need to recommend and distribute them. As much as possible, these curriculum materials should be accessible to learners in every dimension. They should be designed so that students can pursue them independently, with limited support from busy parents who may be working, caring for other children, or sick. Instructions should be simple, with realistic expectations as well as opportunities for extension. They should be disseminated in as many ways as possible: printed and mailed packets, online document downloads, text message broadcasts, pre-recorded phone messages, and radio or television broadcasts. Schools should prioritize low-bandwidth options for families with limited internet access. Materials should be translated into multiple

At every level of schools, we need to find new ways to listen to each other at a distance.

languages and adhere to accessibility guidelines for disabled learners.

I appreciated a remote learning lesson plan from Kelly Gallagher, an English Language Arts high school teacher in Anaheim, California. He encouraged his students to journal two pages a day about their experiences and to seed their writings with interesting readings, news reports, or stories from the pandemic. He promised to share his own writing, and he also encouraged students to read for 30 minutes each day. That's it. While he published more details online, the gist of his syllabus fits into a text message.

Given all of the complexities of curating, translating, screening for accessibility, and publishing projects and enrichment activities, teachers and schools should focus on these kinds of activities, which are simple, rich, extensible, reinforce important skills, and tap into student interests and agency.

How will teachers remotely coach students?

Teachers will need guidelines about how to safely, compassionately, and regularly support students and families. There are four categories of ways teachers can engage students: (1) whole-class broadcasts, (2) individual coaching and check-ins, (3) synchronous meetings, and (4) facilitating small group and peer learning. Schools should provide teachers with guidance for how best to approach these four modes in their local context.

Teachers will need to regularly send messages to their students to provide support, offer feedback, celebrate progress, mourn loss as illnesses and deaths mount, and offer guidance. In an Advance Placement class, this might mean recording lectures for students who are determined to take the tests this spring. In an elementary class, teachers might read chapters of the class book. Again, teachers should prioritize accessibility: making materials available in simple, low-bandwidth communications with attention to translations and accessibility. In contexts with diverse learners, this may mean that whole class broadcasts will need to be limited (weekly rather than daily), as it can be time consuming to produce accessible materials.

Teachers should check in with their students as regularly as possible; the best virtual school teachers report that they spend most of their time reaching out to students individually. These communications could happen by phone calls, messaging services, or video conferences, but districts will need to provide guidance about how to safely facilitate the communications and how to keep parents and caregivers informed and involved. During check-ins, teachers can offer tutorials, feedback on projects and enrichment work, or just support, care, and listening during a challenging time. There are major obstacles to how much educators can teach and instruct at a distance during a pandemic, but hopefully many schools can find coaching and support models that work.

Since we know that students who struggle academically and who have unstable home lives will be the most severely affected by the transition to online learning, teachers should make a special effort to reach out and connect with these students. The students who need the most help during these challenging times may be the least likely to reach out.

The last two communication modes—facilitating whole class and small group/peer to peer meetings—will be the most challenging. Not only is it logistically difficult to have students meet at the same time, but there are privacy issues with having cameras turned on (and potentially recording) in teacher and student homes across the country. Synchronous meetings can be a powerful time for celebrations and community building, but they raise challenging issues. In the early days of the pandemic, online college courses were beset with trolls interrupting lectures, sharing pornographic images, making vile comments in chat boards, and so forth. Teachers face additional risks of having their teaching recorded and broadcast without permission, of witnessing abuse in homes, and other potential issues. With strong cultural norms, thoughtful selection of technology tools, careful attention to default settings, and clear guidance for teachers, these can be powerful modes of learning, but they come with risks that schools need to understand and address.

How will you partner with students, teachers, and families?

The coronavirus pandemic feels like something that is being done to us. There is a sense of powerlessness as we watch our worlds contract to our homes, apartments, and

temporary shelters. But our response to the crisis can be something that we can do together. At every level of schools, we need to find new ways to listen to each other at a distance. If school leaders haven't surveyed teachers, students, and families about how things are going, today is the day to start. Even a simple three question survey can gather valuable data: "How are you? What has been going well for you? What could we do more of, or do better, to help your learning?" Teachers can ask these questions of students; schools can ask these questions of parents; districts can ask these questions of faculty and families.

Asking these questions will do two things. First, the answers to these questions may provide useful new ideas. Perhaps more important, the more that stakeholders feel like they are partners co-constructing a response, the more invested they will be in learning.

How will you plan for re-entry?

In its guidance, the state of Massachusetts recommends that schools aim to get in about 50 percent of the typical amount of learning time. Many students facing difficult home lives, poverty, disengagement, or illness will simply miss all or most of their learning during the next few weeks or months of school closures. While schools are understandably scrambling to set up modes of remote learning, perhaps the most important work of this period should be planning ahead. What gets taught in your school during the spring quarter that students really need to be successful in future years? What do students learn at the end of 3rd grade or the end of a pre-calculus course that they will need in the beginning of 4th grade or the beginning of a calculus class?

Grade-level teams, department heads, curriculum coordinators, and coaches should be looking ahead to these challenges. How can you make more time for that urgent material in the fall? How can courses be rearranged so that if a fall class typically starts with 1 day for review on an important topic, teachers can make time for 3 or 4 days? With federal and state stimulus money for schools, what might be possible for summer school in August or extended-day time in the fall?

In the current scramble to remote learning, it may feel like nothing is more important than making something that works for tomorrow or next week. But given all of the challenges that schools will have in teaching during a crisis in April and May, it may be more productive to invest substantial time in planning for making things up in summer and fall.

A Cautious Approach to Experimentation

I have spent the last ten years studying education technology and online learning, and yet I have written very little about fancy digital tools in my advice here. That's because spinning up new school technology initiatives during the best of times is challenging; during a pandemic it is just extraordinarily difficult. As much as possible, schools should try to publish materials and check in with students using their existing technology infrastructure. How much can you publish and disseminate through phone trees, text messages, email, simple webpages, or your existing online infrastructure? How much coaching and checking in can be done with tools that students are already using? It may be that after days or weeks of remote learning, a glaring weakness in the distance learning infrastructure emerges, where some kind of new technology might be worth introducing. But generally, keep it simple.

Publish good projects and learning resources. Make them accessible. Disseminate widely. Check in with students. Solicit feedback. Plan for re-entry.

Schools that do a few simple things well, listen to stakeholders, and plan for the future will likely be in the best position on the other side of this crisis. My hat is off, and my heart is with, all of the teachers and administrators serving students and families in these difficult times. EL

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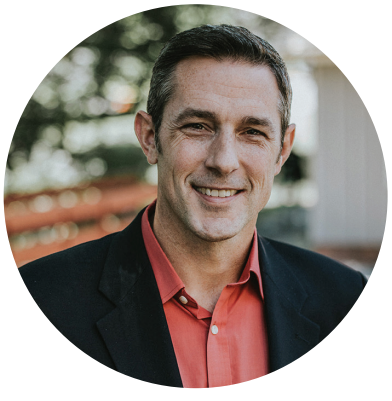
RESTORING CONNECTION: Real-Life Advice on Transitioning to Online Learning

A distance-learning expert shares tips on moving to teaching online in a difficult time.



***Mike Flynn**, a former 2nd grade teacher, is the director of Mathematics Leadership Programs at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, where he and his colleagues have created an innovative and highly regarded online-learning system for graduate students in math education. He is also a widely sought distance-learning trainer who has worked with K–12 school districts and higher education faculty around the country on best practices for online instruction. He recently launched a popular online teacher support group based on a series of free video training sessions.*

With many schools making the transition to online-learning platforms in response to the coronavirus outbreak, we talked with Flynn about what school leaders and teachers need to know.

What should schools or educators be looking for in an online-learning platform, especially if we're talking about a fairly quick transition?

The first thing I always recommend is to think about what teaching practices or pedagogy you want to leverage—that's the priority. Often people will make the mistake of looking at online learning from the perspective of what's available in terms of technology and then figuring out how to use that as a teacher. It's more important to look at how do you want to teach and what's out there to help you do that. So what I find easiest—the combination that causes the least amount of disruption—is to use some kind of video-conferencing platform, along with the Google Suite, because those applications are so easy to use. For the video conferencing, in some ways it doesn't matter which one you use—it's a matter of finding the one that has the features you want.

Do you have any advice for school leaders on rolling out a new platform for a large group of teachers? What would you focus on in training?

In a time like this, people are going to be scrambling, and there's a steep learning curve. In the short term, I think one important piece of advice is to help teachers prioritize what's the most important for them in terms of their instruction and their connection

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE FLYNN

with students. Everyone's going to be operating on limited amounts of time—elementary teachers in particular might just be meeting with students for a short period of time. So you need to figure out what are the most important things to cover.

The other important advice is to be mindful of our learners, who are all going to be nervous at this time. At this point, there's probably a little bit of fear and uncertainty setting in. So whatever bit of normalcy teachers can inject into these live online settings is important. For elementary teachers, that might mean holding your morning meeting, or in kindergarten, you might have a morning song. Or for high school teachers, think about an engaging or interactive routine that you always do with your class that you can bring into this new setting. The point is to help students see that we're still a class. Yes, we're in a different space, but there's still some familiarity to what we're doing. And then as you move forward, you start thinking about how do we leverage those live online times we have together—and what are some meaningful, creative ways that you can create work for kids to do when you're not on camera with them, because a lot of the work is going to be independent.

What are some ways that teachers can ensure that kind of ongoing engagement?

Part of this is to use the live time to make sure kids have a sense of what's expected when they are working on their own. You also need to make sure that the independent work is something the students have some level of familiarity with, so that what they're doing is working on practice—basically, we're talking good homework strategies, which means not giving new learning for homework. That's a big piece of it. Another strategy is to think of other creative ways that you can mix up the kinds of work kids are doing outside the live class time, so it's not all just paper and pencil. Maybe the students can create a slideshow to show their learning, or maybe they could collaborate using Google apps. If you have some 8th graders who

The point is to help students see that we're still a class. Yes, we're in a different space, but there's still some familiarity to what we're doing.

are doing a project based on a book they just read, you might have them create a presentation using Google Slides. That's a good way for them to synthesize their learning in a new medium. This kind of thing mixes it up for kids so they get different experiences.

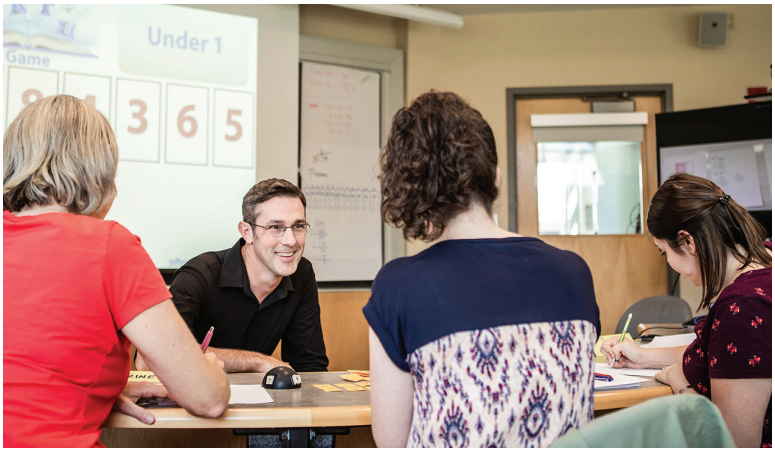
You emphasize the importance of providing guidelines for students for working in an online learning environment. What would that look like?

A teacher who is beginning to teach online should think about what a week looks like, what a day looks like in this class. What's happening live versus asynchronously? What's the schedule? What technology is going to be used when? So these are the things that teachers and school leaders need to be thinking about, in effect putting the pieces of the puzzle in place. This is why I always say less is more: The fewer platforms you're using, the less confusion there is.

Once teachers know what they're going to do, they need to create a concrete way for kids and their parents to be able reference the plan and procedures. It could be in a Google Doc, it could be a slideshow, or even a short video. The point is just to explain, here's what we'll do at this time, you'll get on, you'll log-in here, or you'll open up this Google Drive folder and see today's work in there. Having a good, sharable plan makes it easier to have everyone on the same page.

What kind of tech support do teachers and students need in transitioning to an online setting? How best can schools prepare for and troubleshoot problems?

Most schools have some IT folks on board, and this is where they step up. Working with school leaders, they should know what platforms are going to be used and then try to anticipate the common tech problems. These are fairly predictable—there are connectivity issues, there are microphone problems, there are difficulties locating particular features. So you identify the most common tech issues that are going



to come up and you put those in a table. Then you have separate troubleshooting columns for what the students are supposed to do, what the parents are supposed to do, and what the teacher is supposed to do when these issues come up. For instance, if the tech issue is that a student's internet goes down, then the parents and students can look at the table and figure out, "Oh, my job is to continue with the assignments that I printed out and to let the teacher know by texting them."

You can't predict everything, but the nice thing when you do this sort of contingency planning is that you predict most of the things. Then if something out of the ordinary happens, you have the brain space to address it because you don't have 20 emails from people saying, "Hey, my internet's down," or "I can't find the Google folder." You've already taken care of a lot of that stuff.

Are there effective ways schools can address access or resource disparities within a class—for example, if some students don't have regular access to the internet or to a computer?

One good rule of thumb is to design the materials based on the lowest level of access. So if one of your students doesn't have internet access, you essentially proceed as if no one did. This might mean distributing packets of materials and assignments to students' homes. But you could also have students connect to online experiences by phone—for example, students can call in to a Zoom meeting if it's set up for that. So the teacher can design the lesson to be more of an auditory experience. Another option—assuming kids have at least limited access to a computer or cell phone—is to record lessons and distribute them by email or text or even snail mail. To avoid privacy issues, you can record the lesson with the students' images and voices turned off. Or you can pre-record the lesson. My son's middle school language arts teacher records read-alouds for his class—she's reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and then asking questions which the kids respond to in writing afterwards. So students are still getting the teacher's voice, clarity, and direction, but they don't have to be able to attend a live online class.

How do you approach assessment in an online class?

That's a big question. With the assessment piece, we're going to have to recognize that we're not going to have the same sort of control we're accustomed to—because it's done asynchronously, and we can't necessarily see what students are doing. There are some software programs that students can log-in to to take tests, but there's still really no way to verify that they don't have someone else doing it for them or aren't looking at course materials. So, opinions differ, but my stance is that at a time like this, the most important thing for us to focus on is the continuation of actual teaching and learning. Assessment is part of that process

in terms of helping find out what kids are learning, but we need to look at it through that formative lens, and we need to have a level of trust in students that they will do the work on their own to show us what they understand. It's that feedback that's important. The alternative is the accountability lens, where we focus on whether a kid is cheating, but I think we need to suspend that view of assessment in the present context. There's just not a place for it.

Many parents and caregivers are also feeling overwhelmed by the transition to remote learning. Are their ways teachers can help them or make things a little easier on them?

I think a big part of this is being mindful about communication. We need to recognize that parents have a flood of emails coming in every day from schools right now, on top of their regular work emails. So we need to try to be super concise and to the point in our emails. Use bulleted lists and take out extraneous text and narrative. It's just really helpful for families if they can scan your email and get what they need to know. I'd also recommend limiting emails to parents to one a week. If possible, send it as team and break it down by subject matter with bulleted list for each subject on what to do when. One step better is to provide checklists. This can save parents a lot of time.

I'd also emphasize again the need to follow the general rules of good homework. If we're giving assignments or tasks that allow kids to practice skills and synthesize their learning and not have to learn new content on their own, it's going to eliminate the need for them to have to constantly get help from their parents. This is really an equity issue as well. If I'm assigning a project that has kids working with their parents for 45 minutes, that's going to be unfair to kids whose parents have to go to work or who have multiple children.

So we need to think hard about workload management. It's also important for kids to have some quality time doing things other than sitting in front of a screen—whether it's going outside in the yard or getting some exercise or doing something creative on their own. I recently saw a great quote on Twitter about how what we're doing right now isn't really home schooling or even distance learning, it's *crisis learning*. We have to keep that in mind. We need to design instructional experiences that move kids along but also take into account that we're in just a really weird time right now and need to be flexible.

We need to think hard about workload management. It's important for kids to have some quality time doing things other than sitting in front of a screen.

Any other general tips for educators who are facing this transition right now?

The biggest thing is to work together—to find communities of educators in spaces where you can collaborate, where you can share resources and share ideas. My other advice is for everyone to please practice self-forgiveness. You're going to make mistakes in the platform, things aren't going to work the right way, you're going to try to do something that you think will be very fun and interactive, and the kids will get confused. There's going to be a level of frustration, but as long as the choices we're making are what's in the best interests of students and their learning in this time of crisis, then we're making the right decisions, even if they don't work out perfectly. Forgive yourself. We're all learning and we're all going to get better. EL

—Anthony Rebora

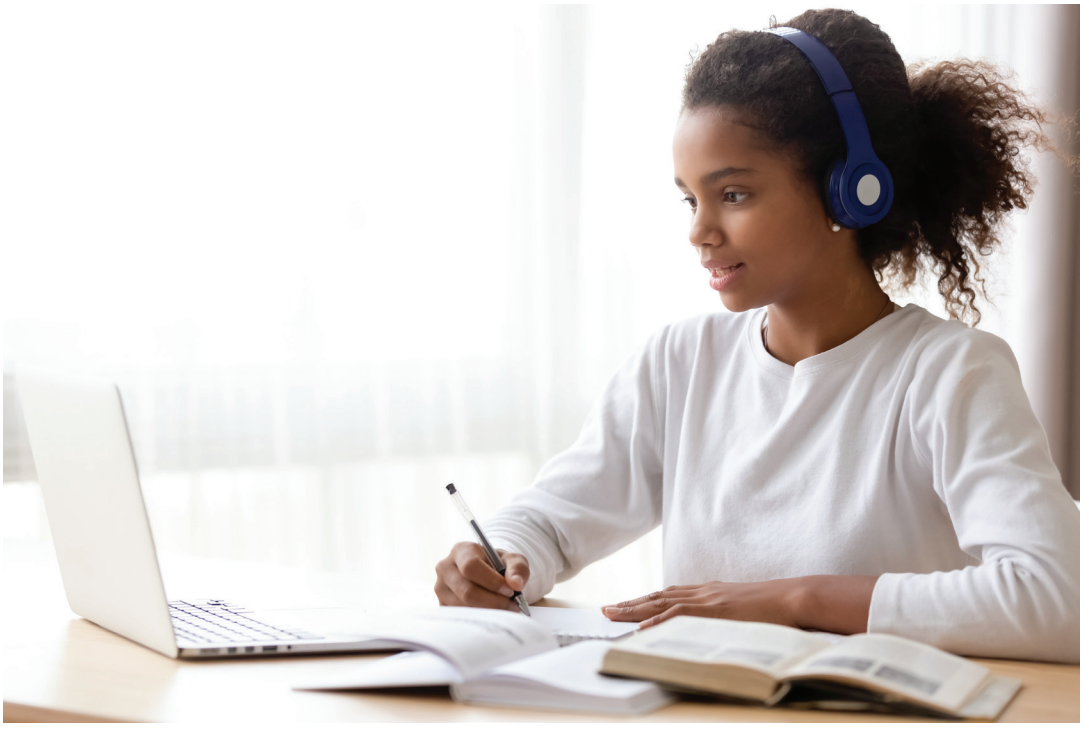
Editor's note: This is an updated and extended version of an interview that originally appeared on ASCD's Inservice blog. The interview has been edited for space.

The keys are prioritizing community and designing student-centered lessons.

Catlin R. Tucker

Successfully Taking OFFLINE Classes ONLINE

Teachers who have taught exclusively offline in a traditional school setting may find the transition to teaching online daunting and foreign. As educators navigate this new reality of school closures, social isolation, and remote learning, it's important to remember that education and learning encompass more than disseminating and collecting assignments. Learning, at its core, is a social endeavor. People learn through their interactions with each other and the world around them.



FIZKES / SHUTTERSTOCK

Given the social nature of learning, educators who are moving their classes online must prioritize community building to ensure their students thrive online.

Creating a Community of Learners

The Community of Inquiry theoretical framework underpins much of the research on online and blended learning and is grounded in collaborative constructivism (Swan, Garrison, & Richardson, 2009). Given the concerns many teachers have about the isolating nature of online courses, I appreciate the focus that the Community of Inquiry places on creating a community of learners who can make meaning while interacting online. This framework provides a structure for teachers to design and facilitate an online course to effectively engage students in active learning.

The Community of Inquiry framework is composed of three interconnected presences—social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence. The social presence refers to the learners' ability to assert their social and emotional selves, view their classmates as real people, and communicate openly online. The teaching presence encompasses the design, instruction, and facilitation of learning in the course. Finally, the cognitive presence is learners' ability to construct meaning through a process of inquiry, dialogue, and reflection (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Understanding the interplay between these presences can help teachers transitioning their courses online create learning experiences that are engaging, student-centered, and leverage the class' collective intelligence.

The Social Presence: Cultivating an Online Community

As teachers move online, a critical first step is to create a safe virtual space that will help students develop their social presence. Traditional teachers shifting classes online mid-year due to school closures may assume that their students know each other and will feel comfortable participating in academic conversations and collaborative tasks online. But I would caution teachers not to assume that the community they have established in-person will automatically translate to the online environment. There are likely students in our classes who have shared the physical classroom all year but who may have never spoken or collaborated on a shared task. The transition to learning online presents an opportunity for teachers to make sure that everyone in the class community knows each other and forms relationships with their peers online that will make their interactions more respectful and rewarding.

A staple of any online course is discussion, and a good online discussion can be a great way to build community and communication skills.

The first step in establishing open, honest, and respectful communication in an online community is to clearly define the expectations for behavior in the online environment. Teachers concerned about what students might say or do online should ask their classes to think about and articulate the behaviors *they* believe will help them to feel comfortable engaging with peers and sharing ideas. Teachers can ask the class to articulate these expectations on a shared digital document.

Asking students to craft the norms and expectations for their online interactions gives them ownership of the space and creates an incentive for them to abide by these guidelines. Teachers can add additional items to the list or ask students to consider specific behaviors to ensure the guidelines address the teacher's concerns about online interactions. Once a clear guide has been established, teachers can pose questions about what consequences are appropriate when the expectations for online communication have been violated. This places the responsibility on the community to think through the appropriate response to missteps, and students are more likely to internalize these

FIGURE 1. Online Icebreaker Discussion Question

Icebreaker: If you could have any superpower, which would you choose and why?

If you could have one of the superpowers below, which would you choose and why?

- ability to stop time
- ability to fly
- ability to become invisible
- ability to read other people's minds
- ability to heal the sick

Begin your post by clearly stating the superpower you would like and thoroughly explain your choice.

Once you have posted your response, please read and reply thoughtfully to at least 2 other members of the class. In your reply, ask questions, comment on specific points made, compliment the ideas shared, and build on ideas shared.

Source: Catlin R. Tucker

expectations and think about what they say and do online.

A staple of any online course is discussion, and a good online discussion can be a great way to build community and communication skills. Icebreaker discussion questions, like the ones in Figure 1, can help students learn about their peers and help them to view their virtual classmates as real people with feelings, values, and beliefs.

Research has established that higher levels of perceived social presence in an online course yield higher levels of interaction, engagement, and satisfaction with that course (Tu & McIsaac, 2002). This suggests that the investment teachers make in building a cohesive online community with a strong social presence will pay dividends.

The Teaching Presence: Designing and Facilitating Online Learning Experiences

Teaching online is obviously different from teaching in a physical classroom, yet there are areas of overlap that may help traditional teachers feel more comfortable making the move online. When I work with teachers who are teaching a blended or entirely online course for the first time, I encourage them to treat their Google Classroom or learning-management system (like Schoology or Canvas) as their online classroom—to think of it as a place where students engage and learn, not just a place to just post things. This is the place where students will access information and resources, engage with their teacher and their peers, and submit their work for feedback and evaluation.

Once teachers begin to treat their learning-management system as their virtual classroom, they can begin to think about their roles and responsibilities in this online environment. The Community of Inquiry framework specifically identifies course design, direct instruction, and facilitation of learning as central to the teaching presence in an online course (Swan et al., 2009).

Traditional teachers must think differently about the organization and design of their online courses. It is a mistake to think that K–12 students who spend seven hours a day in a traditional classroom can spend that same amount of time in front of a computer at home. That is an unrealistic, and frankly unhealthy, expectation. Students who are isolated at home because of school closures and social distancing mandates are juggling a lot mentally and emotionally. They are negotiating a shared space with their family. They may be sharing devices and limited bandwidth with parents and siblings. They may also be dealing with fear and anxiety about the current health crisis.

It's important to adopt a modular approach to designing distance-learning experiences. Teachers must break up the learning activities into smaller parts and give students time to self-pace through those activities. The beauty of online learning lies in the flexibility it affords learners. I would encourage teachers to plan a week at a time and post all of the videos, articles, podcasts, online discussion questions, and assignments that students will need at the start of the week. When teachers post

FIGURE 2. The Building Blocks of an Online Lesson

Building Block	Objective	Online Tools
Direct Instruction	Transfer information (lecture or mini-lesson) or explain a complex topic.	Use Screencastify or QuickTime to record a screencast.
Modeling	Conduct a think-aloud as you navigate a task, apply a strategy, practice a skill, or use an online tool or resource.	Use Screencastify or QuickTime to record a video showing students how to do something or record a screencast to demonstrate how to navigate something online.
Discussion	Engage students in academic conversations about a text, video, podcast, topic, or issue.	Post discussion questions on Google Classroom or use the discussion question feature in your learning management system to engage students in asynchronous text-based discussions. Host a synchronous discussion using a video conferencing tool like Google Meet or Zoom to allow students to engage in a real-time discussion.
Research and Exploration	Encourage students to research a topic or issue and crowdsource the information they find.	Give students a topic to research online and ask them to crowdsource what they are learning in a shared space online (an online discussion board, shared online document or slide deck, Padlet Wall, or FlipGrid).
Collaborative Tasks	Group students online and allow them to work collaboratively on shared tasks.	Use a collaborative suite, like Google or Microsoft, to engage groups of students online (shared documents or slide decks).
Practice and Review	Connect students with practice and review activities.	Use online resources, like Quizizz, Kahoot!, Quizlet, KhanAcademy, or NoRedInk, to encourage review and to create retrieval activities. Use digital documents (Google Documents or Microsoft OneNote) to assign review activities or writing assignments.
Assessment	Assess student work and use that data to determine what students need moving forward.	Administer tests and quizzes using online assessment tools. Assign a writing prompt, task, or project designed to assess the students' mastery of content and skills.
Reflection and Metacognitive Skill Building	Ask students to think about what they learned, how they learned it, what questions they have about the concepts or skills covered, and what support they need to continue improving.	Use Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, or Socrative to create an end-of-the-week exit ticket to encourage students to develop their metacognitive muscles. Teachers can also ask students to reflect in an online journal or learning log about their progress each week.

Source: Catlin R. Tucker

the week's work, they should clearly identify the learning objectives for the week, due dates for specific tasks, and times when the teacher will be available for "office hours" via video conferencing tools like Google Meet or Zoom. This approach allows learners the luxury of completing tasks at a time and pace that works for *them*.

The Cognitive Presence: Engaging the Class in Meaning Making

If teachers think about the building blocks of a traditional lesson, they will begin to see how those modular activities (direct instruction, discussion, collaborative group work, and others) can be shifted online using a variety of tools, many of which are probably already embedded into their learning-management system. Figure 2 breaks down some of the basic building blocks that educators use to design offline lessons and describes how teachers can use technology tools to engage students in these activities online.

As teachers think about how these individual building blocks fit together to form a learning experience that extends over a week or several weeks, it is helpful to consider using the 5Es instructional model—engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate—as a guide when arranging these building blocks (Bybee, 2015). This model provides teachers with a clear path to designing a learning experience that will develop the cognitive presence in a distance-learning community. It prioritizes inquiry, exploration, collaboration, and communication.

Teachers begin by engaging students in a conversation about what they think or wonder, what they already know, or what they would like to find out about a particular topic. Then students explore the topic. Teachers can provide links to articles, videos, and podcasts about a topic, or students can conduct their own research. The "explain" phase of this cycle encourages students to share what they have learned, and the elaborate phase encourages students to make connections between what they are learning and other concepts covered in the course as well as their lives beyond the classroom. It also gives them opportunities to practice, review, and apply what they learned. The learning cycle ends with an evaluation activity to assess what students learned or to ask them to engage in a reflective activity thinking about what they learned to develop their metacognitive muscles.

The beauty of the 5Es instructional model is that it emphasizes the role of the learner in the process of making meaning in a course.

Student-Centered Online Learning

Just because learning is moving online does not mean that students should be relegated to the role of passive receivers of information. Instead, I would like to see teachers prioritize student-centered learning by developing online communities and designing lessons that leverage technology tools and instructional models that actively engage students in each part of the learning process. EL

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Accommodations, Modifications, and Intervention at a Distance

To support special education students during school shutdowns, educators need careful coordination and a focus on what matters most.

Lee Ann Jung

Never in our lifetime has a global health crisis caused the need for such a broad swath of long-term school closings as we are experiencing with the novel coronavirus outbreak. Teachers who have experimented with "flipping" their classrooms and other ways to teach online probably have a certain level of confidence in this sudden shift to remote learning. But for those who've never experienced online learning or teaching or feel less confident with digital technology, this can be an unwelcome and stressful change. The challenges are particularly steep for educators working with students with disabilities.

The good news for teachers new to some of the online technology is that we haven't moved purely to "online school," but rather to remote

learning. Within remote learning, the options for connection with students and families include online videoconferencing, phone calls, video calls to an individual, texting, email, and mail. From an equity standpoint, it's necessary that we're prepared to use any of these methods to support connecting (first) and learning.

Yet the unprecedented nature of this health crisis leaves us with new questions about how to provide special services to students, not for a few days, but for weeks and months. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs has responded with online documents and videos and has also been clear that if a school moves to remote learning, it must ensure that students who have IEPs have access to that instruction (OSEP, 2020). Many special educators have implemented home-based instruction and interventions in the past, but never have they been forced to do so with no in-person contact and for the entire population of students with IEPs.

Urgent questions are circulating. "How do we deliver intervention at a distance?", "How do we provide accommodations and modifications to online work?", "How do I measure progress?", "What about students with severe disabilities?", and "How can we support families?" Some support and intervention can be provided by shifting to web conferencing and phone calls, but direct, online services often aren't an option for our youngest learners and students with more significant intellectual disabilities. In this "new normal," special educators are charged with serving many students solely through consulting with their classroom teachers and families. For students whose supports are now provided mainly through such educator-to-educator consultation, the families are now an even more important part of the equation. How do we do this in a way that supports families, rather than burdening them with overwhelming responsibility?

As we're already seeing, the move to remote learning exacerbates preexisting issues of equity in schools. Delivering instruction at a distance isn't simple, even when students have no difficulties with learning, a dedicated device in a quiet space, a household with low stress levels, and parents able to support learning. But this ideal situation is far from ubiquitous. The proportion of families who are currently unemployed or underemployed, food insecure, and experiencing high levels of stress is higher than we've ever seen. We have students who require accommodations, modifications, and intervention now at home with their families—many of whom are unsure of how to provide the support they need.

While the situation is unprecedented, there *are* steps schools can take to support students who have IEPs in remote-learning settings. We will no doubt learn a great deal from one another and from our students and families in the coming months. In the meantime, the following suggestions can be a way to start thinking about some of the many service-delivery questions our teams are facing.

First, Support the Family

Families are in some ways being put in the role of "learning coach" now, and for some, this role is uncomfortable. We want to maximize the time families have to give to supporting their child's learning, streamline it as much as possible with their lives, and minimize their feeling like a full-time teacher or therapist. Already under enormous pressure, millions of people have lost their jobs. Millions more are tasked with working full-time at home in a new way and supporting their children in online learning. Those of you who are both educators and parents no doubt feel this.

By now, you've probably seen on social media the phrase, "We have to Maslow before we Bloom," meaning we must attend to the needs identified by Maslow's hierarchy before we can engage students in the levels of learning shown in Bloom's taxonomy. This has never been truer than now. To support students, we must connect with them and their families to learn more about their resources, priorities, and

concerns. So our first task is to reach out to families to build relationships and find out how they're doing as a family.

Schools can make a plan for teachers to reach out to each family individually by phone call or video call. There should be a primary contact teacher or counselor for each family. With younger students, this primary person will be easier to identify. In secondary schools, teachers can divide the students among themselves for making the first call. If there is a special connection that has been established between a student and a teacher, this is a good reason to attach the student to that teacher's list. Special educators should reach out in the same way to all the families they serve individually. Are there basic needs and worries—and can we help in any way? How is the student coping with the change? Do they have internet connection and devices? If so, how many devices? Can the student use the available online tools? What is their preferred way to communicate? To the extent to which real-time communication, such as video and phone calls can be used, we reduce the "transactional distance" (Moore, 2007) families and students feel.

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All this information can inform how we then support the student and family—and how much we ask them to take on. We need to find out what the family's main priorities are right now, for their family and their child. Purposefully focusing on families' priorities will go a long way in building a collaborative partnership. Just as we give students as much choice as possible, let's give families choices in what we support and how.

For teachers who already have an excellent relationship with a family, this information may flow freely. But for connections that are a bit more distant or new, it may take time to establish a trusting relationship in which families feel comfortable being vulnerable enough to express what they need and fear and worry about. Share some of what you are experiencing personally, and remove the formality we might display in a school setting. Keep reaching out and checking on them. This emotional support may be the most important of the services you provide during this time.

Focus on What Learning Matters Most

In this time of crisis, educators are doing our best to keep the learning happening. But we are in no way trying to recreate the classroom in students' homes. There has been a seismic shift in context, not only physical environment, but also emotional environment. Recreating lessons at home isn't our task.

Classroom teachers should be working quickly to highlight the most critical elements of the curriculum, possibly through vertical teams that are identifying the most crucial skills for success in the following grade. These essential skills and understandings will be the focus of the remainder of the school year. Specialists who work to serve students who have IEPs must be part of these teams, since their job will be to help classroom teachers ensure all students have access to this leaner curriculum in a distance format. Leaders and teachers must remember to include special educators in planning discussions, collaborating with them to generate ideas for accommodations and modifications and to ensure instruction is accessible.

Although classroom teachers and specialists must implement each student's full IEP, the focus may shift, and our methods most likely will, depending on how the curriculum shifts and on family priorities. A student may, for example, be feeling a lot of anxiety about the change in routines. So we may need to support the family to help their child adjust to a new way of doing school. It's OK to press pause right now to refocus. When I teach people

to write IEPs, I ask them to think about the student and complete this sentence: "If the student could only do ___, it would change their life forever." By considering with students, families, and classroom teachers what would be life changing for a student to learn to do, we can focus on what matters most. When we can add more, fantastic. But in the beginning, we may need to focus our efforts differently and on fewer, life-changing outcomes.

Problem Solve to Make the Learning Accessible

For students who have been included in general education classrooms and have the ability to connect online, we want to find out from them where they need support to access the online learning. How are they accessing web-based content? What is working well? What's frustrating? What do they wish their classroom teachers knew? How does the assistive technology they already use work within the new online environment, and is any new technology needed?

It's best for students to tell their classroom teachers where they need additional support or access points, but special educators can facilitate this by talking through with students the tasks teachers have assigned and asking questions relative to students' past needs for accommodations or modifications. For example, a student may have needed clarification and visuals to support learning during in-person lessons. By thinking through the new way content is presented by each teacher in the online environment, we can guide students to identify where supports are missing and what might be added to help them learn better. Such support may be as simple as recording the online meeting with a teacher for replay or providing clearer organization within the learning management software. It may involve working with the family and student to organize their day or materials in a new way.

When we have information from each student on their new needs for support, we can problem solve with their teachers to make the learning environment and its demands accessible and beneficial. For example, we may need to orient students to any technology that is new or different, or to changes remote learning makes in the demands on their abilities. Or they may need captioning for online videos. Converting from excellent classroom teaching practices to presenting content through many pages of online text without in-person support introduces new barriers for many students, especially those who have reading comprehension difficulties. If we are expecting students to use a new learning-management system, or particular websites, or videos, these must be accessible to all students using them. Measuring progress may involve reviewing products, having reflective conversations with students and families, or using technology in creative ways. Either way, we will be looking to families and students to participate in evaluating progress, which can absolutely create a positive shift in assessment for the future.

In terms of the specialized interventions we deliver, there may be clear options for providing those online. There may also be options for supporting families in implementing an intervention the team designs. But not all students have internet or device access. Although we will be able to continue providing much of the support at home that was delivered in school, there may be insurmountable barriers to delivering some of the interventions students were receiving in school, or the importance of those interventions may have changed. The U.S. Department of Education acknowledges there could be exceptional circumstances that affect service delivery during this time. But the department also compels us to prepare to address gaps, should any result from school closures (OSEP, 2020), so educators will need to figure out ways to address these issues promptly as schools reopen.

Keep Friendships Going

Students are, no doubt, missing the social connections they have at school. The ability to be with their friends in and out of the classroom is

suspended, and this is tough for students and their families. Many students with disabilities have received support at school to interact socially and have friends; some of them are now isolated from these friendships and aren't used to keeping them up through technology.

This social interaction is critically important for *all* students' social-emotional well-being, but it doesn't naturally occur for everyone. When possible, we can use technology to intentionally facilitate connections between students and between families, so this interaction can continue. The social groups students had in person can likely continue online or via phone. For students who have limited access to technology, we can arrange "pen pals" for exchange of letters, drawings, and photos. Receiving a real letter from a friend can be novel and exciting in 2020. Be sure to adhere to IDEA rules for confidentiality in making these connections by obtaining consent if disability status is in any way to be disclosed. But do make the connections.

Try a Routines-Based Approach

For very young students and students with more significant disabilities, our support may move from direct delivery of an intervention to helping families in supporting the student. Accessing curriculum online may not be a possibility. In this case, a routines-based approach may be the right way to go. Routines-based intervention is a common way of supporting young children with developmental delays and disabilities in a home setting. In this consultative way of delivering services, teachers use a routines-based interview to find out about what a family typically does on a given day. We find out how the student engages in each routine, how interaction and communication look in the routines, what the student can do independently, and where he or she needs help. We can identify learning opportunities embedded in these routines and design ways families can connect elements of their everyday routines to the student's learning targets and IEP goals (McWilliam, 2010).

For instance, we may find out that a student with a single parent wakes up, has breakfast, and then spends time watching TV or playing with her older sister. The parent keeps her as occupied as possible while he works online, but the older sister is largely in charge of watching her. But this sibling is also trying to do her schoolwork. Lunch is rushed, but the family does have lunch together. At about 4:00 p.m., the parent finishes work and spends some time with the girls, then begins to prepare a meal. They hang out after dinner, and he helps the girls with their schoolwork. This is the schedule of the day, but with more questions, we can identify where the learning opportunities are, and where they are not. We may find that during dinner preparation, there is a great chance to help the student work on grouping and sorting and counting. But we aren't going to suggest this at lunch, because it's a hectic time. We may also find suggestions we might present to her older sister to build vocabulary in a fun way during TV watching time.

If there are significant behavior or communication difficulties during routines, we can identify strategies to make these times easier for families. The idea is, we don't want to add too many "to dos" and additional stress for families right now, but to find small ways to tweak existing routines to find learning opportunities. We want to focus on their priorities and needs to the greatest extent possible.

Take Care of Yourself

During this time, all teachers are feeling pressure to carry out instruction in a new way within a difficult context. Your family may be enduring a great deal of stress, too. Special educators, without a doubt, are concerned about making the new learning methods, instruction, and materials accessible—and the legal implications of the changes. There is little guidance to be found on providing intervention at a distance.

However, don't neglect your own work-life balance. Sure, we may have to connect with families after hours, as they may not be

Teachers who serve students with learning differences are being forced to build new skills in supporting families and students online.

available during the typical school day. We may need to adjust our schedules to accommodate families, because it's even more important than usual to make the connection with them. But shifting doesn't mean working all day and night, as some no doubt are feeling the pressure to do. Breathe. Pat yourself on the back for all the effort you are giving. Be sure to take time for yourself.

Crisis and Opportunity

We are in a time of crisis and uncertainty in our world. Teachers who serve students with learning differences are being forced to build new skills and creativity in family support, collaboration with classroom teachers, and consultative service delivery.

It's been said that the Chinese written word for *crisis* is composed of two characters, one representing danger and the other opportunity—and this crisis presents opportunities for us as well as danger. We may not have the same number of hours and materials and interaction we had a few weeks ago, but that reality presents an opportunity to grow closer and more personal relationships with students and families. And out of this trying time, we will absolutely develop new tools that will help us serve students more holistically and with greater focus going forward; that's key because peer-reviewed studies and recommendations for remote delivery of special education services are currently very limited.

So, let's see the hope in this time; let's see the opportunity to grow and learn together as teams of students, families, classroom teachers, and specialists. Future generations of students (with and without learning differences) will benefit from what we learn and how we grow in providing more accessible and equitable instruction and intervention. EL

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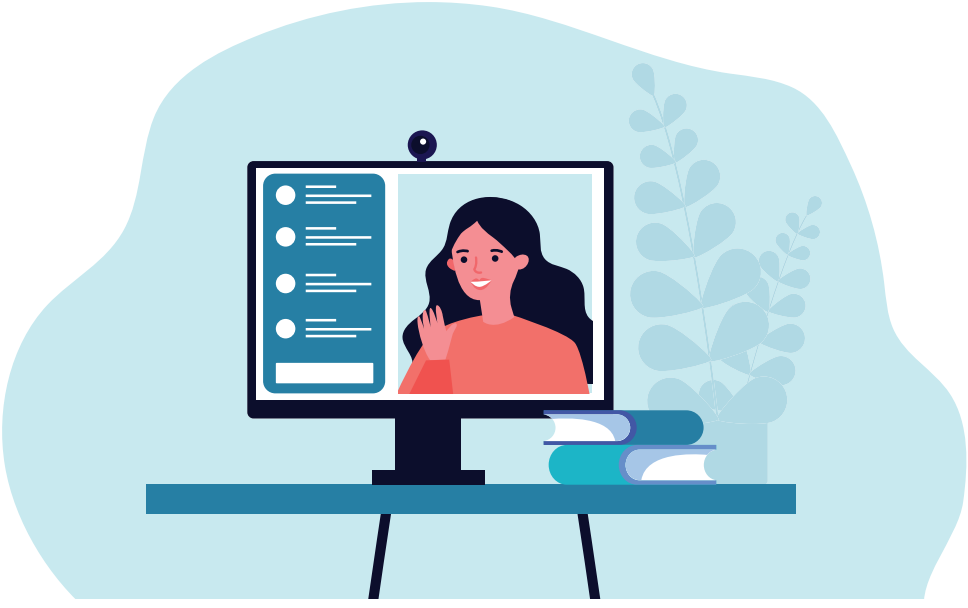

Maintaining Connections, Reducing Anxiety While School Is Closed

Teachers can play a huge role in helping students with anxiety or trauma histories feel safe right now—even from a distance.

Jessica Minahan

Seemingly overnight, the world changed. Teachers and school leaders have had to revamp their entire instructional systems with, in many instances, only a day's notice. To say many of us are experiencing whiplash, disorientation, and anxiety is an understatement.

Our students are feeling it too. Typically, nationwide, one in three teenagers has experienced clinically significant anxiety in their lifetime (Merikangas et al., 2010). It's probable that during a pandemic that heavily impacts everyday life, levels of anxiety in children and teens are even higher, and the possibility of subsequent trauma greater.

In these unprecedented times, teachers are rising to the occasion creatively and quickly to shift to remote learning amidst school closures.

Even in a traditional classroom, it can be a challenge to support students with anxiety and trauma histories to stay calm and learn. With distance learning, this difficulty is magnified. However, there is much teachers *can* do to reduce anxiety in students even while teaching remotely. During this crisis, we need to prioritize students' mental health over academics. The impact of trauma can be lifelong, so what students learn during this time ultimately won't be as important as whether they feel safe.

Typically, nationwide, one in three teenagers has experienced clinically significant anxiety in their lifetime. It's likely that during a pandemic, anxiety levels in children and teens are even higher.

Essential: Maintaining Connections

In a time of crisis and change, when students are separated from their school adults, it's paramount to help them continue to feel safe, cared for, and connected. Strong relationships with teachers can insulate anxious students from escalating.

Teachers across the country are finding creative ways to stay connected with students. For example, many communities have held a "teacher parade," with educators driving through the neighborhood while students waved from their doorsteps. Teachers have also, with precautions for safety, delivered school lunches door-to-door.

Connecting doesn't have to be time-consuming to be effective. Providing a video of yourself explaining a concept, posing a challenge question, or doing a read aloud is a fabulous way to help students feel connected to you and the class. In any video, greeting the students and explicitly telling them you miss being with them and can't wait to see them again is a powerful way to help them feel cared for.

Whenever possible, make the effort to connect with each student individually. One supportive adult can help a student overcome a very difficult home situation and shield them from resultant anxiety (Brooks, 2003). A connection with a caring teacher can be a lifeline for a vulnerable student. For students who don't have internet access, try a cell phone-based messaging communication system like Remind—or traditional mail. Other strategies for making these individual connections include:

- *Send individual messages.* Instead of sending a group email to students, copy and paste the content and send it individually to each student, using their name in the opening. When communicating individually with a student (through Google Classroom, email, etc.), use the student's name often in the correspondence. It will make them feel special.
- *Make phone calls.* Receiving a call at home can cheer up not only the student, but the parents as well, and provides tangible proof that you care. Creating a Google Voice account will allow parents and students to leave voicemails for you. You can also send and receive texts with a family in their home language using this app.
- *Send a brief letter to each of your students and include a stamped envelope so they can respond.* This is a nice way to start a dialogue. Jotting a personal note back to a student who responds can mean the world to that student if she's feeling isolated and anxious. You can do a similar thing via email, but sending letters through the mail can ensure equity for students who may not have consistent computer access. A letter is also something concrete a student can save and refer to when feeling stressed.
- *Use a folder in Google Classroom or other file-sharing program for students to share art and other work.* This allows you to provide personal

Students with anxiety and trauma histories tend to think negatively. Scary information can be magnified.

positive feedback, which is essential for students who don't receive acknowledgement from their caregivers.

■ *Hold "office hours" during which students and caretakers can check in through messaging, a conferencing app, or a phone call to ask for help or to connect.* For older learners, you might schedule small-group Zoom, Skype, or Google Hangouts meetings for students who need help with content, creating another opportunity to provide more individual attention.

■ *Create routines.* Consistency helps students feel safe and calm. Having something like a recorded video morning greeting or a Zoom help session at the same time each day gives structure to the day, and is helpful when things feel unpredictable.

■ *Establish daily check-ins.* Have students show you how they are feeling. For young students, this might mean sending an emoji during morning meeting with the option of sharing publicly or just with you, or at any age students can signal a thumbs up or thumbs down before a distance-learning lesson. Students in upper elementary through high school could use a private Google form to check in each day (see an example from the Association of Middle Level Education). If a student indicates distress in his or her check-in, follow up through email, one-on-one conferencing, or a phone call.

■ *Use the village.* Give each member of the school community who isn't involved in distance learning (such as paraprofessionals, school nurses, or counselors) a list of families to call weekly. It would be helpful to give each caller a reference sheet for how to respond to anxiety in students (using the suggestions below).

Responding to Anxiety, Fear, or Panic

As we keep lines of communication and connection open, educators need to be prepared to respond to difficult questions from stressed and traumatized students. Students with anxiety and trauma histories tend to think negatively. Scary information can be magnified. Here are some suggestions for responding most helpfully:

■ *Validate feelings.* Before you make any suggestions, reflect back something like "It sounds like you're scared" or "I'm sorry you are so worried." Tell the student it's normal to feel anxious when routines have changed.

■ *Stay calm.* Sometimes it's not what you say, but how you say it. When reassuring students, have the cadence, intonation, and volume of your voice on the phone or video mimic the way you would read a story to a youngster. Students are watching us. If we seem anxious, it could confirm their worst fears.

■ *Be truthful.* Being vague or minimizing the facts can be unsettling to young children—and send older kids searching online for more information, which sometimes creates greater anxiety. We want to make sure they don't overestimate the danger or underestimate their ability to protect themselves—or the need to do so. Tell them the basic facts, including that young people don't typically get sick with the virus and that washing hands and social distancing are the best courses of action. Be optimistic, but don't overpromise when asked about school closings. "I can't wait to be all together again" is more appropriate than "I'll see you soon."

■ *Reframe negative comments.* When a student makes an inaccurate or overly negative comment like "We've been in the house forever" or "We can't ever see my grandmother again," respond with an accurate and more positive reframe: "You have been in the house for 10 days, but it's so nice you are all healthy and together" or "It's so important that you are taking care of your grandmother by staying away. It's wonderful that she's healthy and you can connect over FaceTime." For

more ideas on reframing, see "Mindset Shift During a Pandemic" by mental health advocate Sumaira Z, and for more on reframing negative thoughts, see my 2019 article "Tackling Negative Thinking in the Classroom."

■ *Remind students to look for the helpers.* Mr. Rogers famously said that when frightening information is on the news, children should look for the helpers. This positive focus helps deter negative thinking. A wonderful suggestion to give students after they report an upsetting news story is to ask them to count the helpers mentioned, focusing them on the good that often far outnumbers the bad. Young students can be asked to list five helpers supporting people at this time. Teens might write a letter to—or an essay about—a helper. Encourage students to access positive news stories at goodnewsnetwork.org or inspiremore.com.

■ *Notify a caretaker if a student expresses serious fear and anxiety.* If you have significant concerns regarding panic, self-harm, or aggressive behaviors, you may want to—with the guidance of the school counselor—recommend a parent seek the help of a therapist for their child (many are practicing through remote sessions).

Giving Students a Sense of Control

One of the most terrifying aspects of the pandemic is that it's out of our control. Typically, people have a baseline belief that bad things (like car crashes) are unlikely to happen to them, which stops us from being in a constant state of anxiety. When a crisis affects us all, we can feel that any bad thing is now possible and experience catastrophic thinking ("everyone I love could die!"). Particularly for anxious students and students with trauma histories, maintaining a sense of even limited control can ease this pervasive anxiety. Here are several ways teachers can empower students:

■ *Remind them of what they can control.* Remind students that by following health guidelines like washing hands, getting adequate nutrition, and practicing social distancing, they are protecting themselves and others—and sacrificing for others, which is what heroes do.

■ *Suggest journaling.* Students of all ages can be empowered by keeping a journal about their experience of this unprecedented time (which may even someday be a primary source for historical research).

■ *Encourage helping others.* Research suggests that a focus on helping others is empowering and can help us all feel better in times of crisis (Bokszczanin, 2012). "Distance" volunteering ideas include starting a story and sending it to an elderly neighbor to finish, creating posters to combat racism resulting from COVID-19, reading to younger children via video chat, and making birthday cards for foster children who are celebrating in isolation. Dosomething.org is a great place to find structured online volunteering opportunities for youth.

Remember, Behavior Is Communication

Many students will communicate their feelings through changes in behavior. Not all children and teens react to stress the same way, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists common behavior changes to look out for during this crisis, when interacting with students:

■ Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.

■ Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, bedwetting).

■ Excessive worry or sadness.

■ Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.

■ Irritability and "acting out" behaviors in teens.

■ Difficulty with attention and concentration.

■ Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past.

■ Unexplained headaches or body pain.

■ Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

When you see students disengage from activities, mention alcohol use, or write an irritable note, respond with compassion. Their behavior is their way of telling you "I'm scared, nervous, or uneasy." It's helpful to share this information with caretakers, who may misunderstand the student's behavior as just being lazy or having an attitude. For a detailed list

of common anxiety-related behaviors by age, with suggestions of how families can respond, refer to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's factsheet.

Teach Emotional- and Behavioral-Regulation Strategies

Even when we aren't physically with students, teachers can provide much-needed instruction in emotional-regulation strategies. Students with anxiety and those who are experiencing trauma require specific instruction on how to manage anxious feelings. Their feelings are too big for them to regulate without such guidance, and the student may not have a supportive caretaker.

■ *Share strategies*. In a recorded video greeting or letter, mention strategies that *you* used that day. Create a shared folder on Google Classroom so students can share their own emotional-regulation strategies, like distracting themselves with an engrossing movie. Sharing experiences reduces stigma and normalizes needing strategies or support.

■ *Give reminders*. At the end of a lesson, remind students of a strategy they can use if they're feeling overwhelmed. Tell them you can't wait to connect again tomorrow.

■ *Limit exposure to news, including news or discussions about the pandemic on social media.* Suggest parameters around watching/reading the news, such as not more than 20 minutes per day or only watching the evening news with your family. To shield younger students from scary information, provide caretakers links on how to set up parent controls on devices. Encourage older students to avoid triggering apocalyptic online games like *Pandemic*.

■ *Teach media literacy*. Help students develop skills in evaluating information they read or hear. Teens can complete an assignment about discerning fake news from facts about COVID-19 specifically, or more broadly. Younger students can listen to podcasts on the subject, such as this four-part series from Brains On.

■ *Teach "channel switching."* Teach students that their brain is like a remote control that they can use to "switch the channel" to help them calm down when they're feeling anxious. Cognitive distractions or thought breaks are incompatible with negative thinking and can break the cycle of anxiety. Suggest listening to an audiobook or a "find the picture" book for younger children, or *Mad Libs,* trivia, or saying the alphabet backwards for older ones.

■ *Strengthen independent work skills*. We're asking a lot of our anxious students—to work in a whole new way at a time when they may be flooded by negative thoughts and worry. Self-pacing, organizing materials, initiation, and persistence are challenging tasks for anxious students under typical circumstances. They may actually be dependent on teachers to support them in getting work done. It's helpful to explicitly teach these skills. Suggestions on how to embed specific teaching and strategies for initiation, persistence, and help-seeking behaviors are included in my 2017 *Educational Leadership* article "Helping Anxious Students Move Forward."

■ *Encourage grounding and mindfulness*. Mindfulness practices can protect students from being overcome with anxiety. Being outdoors can be a grounding experience. So whenever possible, embed outdoor activities in science and math lessons and remind students that while they are working on the assignment, outdoors is a great place to practice mindfulness activities (some free resources are available from Mindful).

■ *Focus on gratitude*. Gratitude reduces anxiety and increases well-being (Jans-Beken et al., 2018). Have students keep a gratitude journal or prompt them to write five things they're grateful for as an assignment.

■ *Develop emotional identification*. Giving young students activities that will help them identify the emotions they may be feeling makes the internal experience less scary and more normalized. Whenever possible have read alouds, online games, and videos involve emotional identification and emotional-regulation strategies. Give all students productive ideas for

how to express their feelings, such as drawing or talking to a close friend.

On the Front Lines Against Anxiety

During this crisis, teachers must perform a critical role in combatting trauma and anxiety. While academics are important, our most important task is supporting the mental health of students, especially our most vulnerable students. By maintaining connections, teaching key coping strategies, listening and responding to students' behavior, and helping students feel in control, we can help them come through this challenging time feeling resilient and supported. When the crisis is over, students won't remember what you taught them—they'll remember that you made them feel safe and cared for. EL

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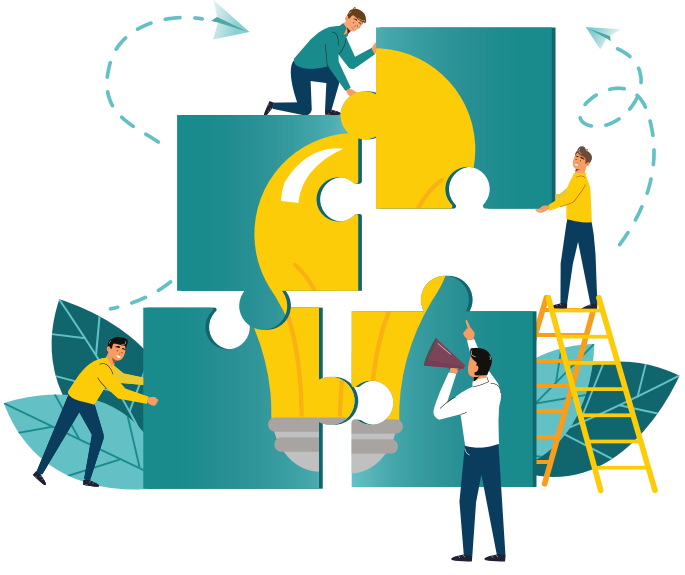
SEVEN STEPS for Districts Navigating to Remote Learning

In shifting to distance learning, here's how school districts can keep students' needs and circumstances front and center.



Michael B. Horn

As schools across the nation have closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, districts have adopted a wide variety of approaches. For those looking to continue to provide ongoing instruction to students—the proper path forward amid this turbulence—the move to remote learning has presented many challenges and prompted a plethora of innovative efforts by teachers and administrators.

With districts scrambling to figure out the right path forward to serve families not set up for full-time virtual school or home-schooling environments (and likely dealing with additional stresses at this time), certain actions can help district leaders discover the right set of solutions for their particular circumstances.

Although there's no one-size-fits-all pathway to supporting learners and teachers in the weeks and months ahead, the following seven tips, which are drawn from a mix of lessons from educators' experiences in the field and work designing innovative school environments, can help district or school leaders chart their own course.

It's important to remember, however, that although those who have done full-time virtual schooling for a while can certainly help, just following a set of "best practices" won't necessarily serve your district well. Those practices, designed for schools fully equipped for online learning, were probably not intended for an emergency situation. Follow these tips in ways that make sense given your own reality and resources. The most important thing is to keep your learners' needs front and center as you move forward.

1 Expect Some Failure and Admit Mistakes

To state the obvious, this is a terribly threatening time. But one silver lining might be that it also represents an opportunity for educators to learn—and to model learning for students. Learning involves failure. You

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When students see teachers and administrators struggle, it creates an opportunity for meaningful conversations about how we're all in this together; we're cocreating this experience and constantly learning.

and your teams will make mistakes. Be honest about them; show students that it's OK to fail and it's OK to ask questions because that's how we learn. When students see teachers and administrators struggle, it creates an opportunity for meaningful conversations about how we're all in this together; we're cocreating this experience and constantly learning.

Remember that people are ready to be empathetic in these times. They will understand that we're all figuring it out right now, and it's OK that you don't have "the answers."

2 Tap the Strengths of Home-Based Learning

Acknowledge that whatever you create won't be school as normal. You won't be able to replicate the classroom environment, nor should you try. The learning set-up will look and feel different—and there will be advantages to students learning at home with their caregivers nearby. As the head of curriculum at my daughters' school wrote to parents recently:

> The home laboratory is something entirely unique and special and rather lovely in its own right—and impossible to replicate anywhere else. Different kinds of real things are done at home. Value and appreciate the opportunity to be home and do some real things.

Schools should heed these words and figure out ways to tap into the different home environments of each student, considering what that means both from a needs mindset (What additional supports must you provide now?) and an asset perspective (What can you leverage from students' home lives to spark learning?). That means considering things like what resources are available in the home in terms of people and objects, what work must be done on a daily basis, and what processes exist in the home, as well as what each family's priorities and values are. For example, if families have pets that require caring, meals that need cooking, or crops that necessitate tending, there are opportunities to tie those into deeper learning opportunities and connect them to school subjects like biology, chemistry, history, English language arts, and more.

3 Build a Strong Shared Culture Anew

Focus on building—in each home, across "classrooms" of students and teachers, and throughout schools—an intentional culture that is conducive to your goals as a district. Organizational culture, as defined by the great Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Edgar Schein, is "a way of working together toward common goals that have been followed so frequently and so successfully that people don't even think about trying to do things another way. If a culture has formed, people will autonomously do what they need to do to be successful." In other words, if a group successfully works together to solve a problem, it will tend to use that same process the next time it confronts a similar problem.

Culture is a powerful aid in making sure what needs to get done will get done. It will help build the agency and ownership students need during this time of learning without teachers to physically oversee them. A strong culture can build structures that will serve your district well into the future, if and when things

return to "normal."

To do so, you will need to identify problems or tasks that recur again and again and task a group with solving one of these with a process that can then be repeated over and over. For example, many districts will be building new processes around how students and teachers should interact virtually. In synchronous online environments, teachers might leverage their expectations from the traditional classroom for how to conduct class conversations with respect and attentiveness, but build in new routines and processes for living up to those expectations when everyone is online together. Districts will also need to consciously decide on expectations around things like how students should respond to teacher prompts when learning is done asynchronously. Is there an expectation that a student will respond within a certain time period? Are certain hours off limits? What language is appropriate and with what mediums? Being deliberate will help create order conducive to a district's goals.

Make sure that all students have a chance to read—or listen—to books each day.

4 Create Schedules and Routines

To go one layer deeper, help students and families create schedules and routines that work for them and create a rhythm and balance to the day. Having a consistent routine gives children a sense of security and stability that comes from having some certainty and control. That's particularly important in uncertain times. And it also ideally creates clear times in their day when they can get support from parents, caregivers, teachers, or other adults.

Also, make sure that all students have a chance to read—or listen—to books each day during a period of sustained quiet. These books will ideally connect to other parts of what students are learning, but at bare minimum, make sure students have chances to read every day, to build their knowledge base.

5 Meet Students' Emotional and Health Needs *First*

Before thinking about learning, make sure students' social, emotional, and physical health is stable. There can be no learning without that strong foundation. And many children need critical supports right now—food security; basic health, safety and even caregiver needs; social connection; and emotional stability.

To provide some of these supports when doing remote learning, figure out how to build in opportunities for teachers to connect synchronously with their students and their parents or guardians on a consistent basis. Make sure teachers have the ability to connect via phone, text, or through online platforms, depending on the students' resources and needs and what your district has in place from a hardware and connectivity perspective. It's also important to create opportunities for students to connect with other students.

A variety of technology tools can help facilitate such connections. Zoom has drawn headlines lately, but other programs can also fill these needs or facilitate related educational experiences, such as Shindig, ClassDojo, or SchoolCNXT, to name a few.

It's imperative to create ways for students to reflect and set goals so they can start to build their agency. Applications like Sown to Grow can help build reflection and goal-setting into students' daily routines. Likewise, physical activity is vital for health. Tools like Plt4M allow you to set up physical activity goals for students and personalized physical education plans. Subscribing to a mindfulness application for both students and all district employees could help bolster everyone's mental health.

6 Celebrate "Wins" with the Kids

Make sure all students have small wins each day—and that there are opportunities to celebrate those wins. Celebrating small wins builds momentum—and it helps students fulfill one of the core jobs in their lives, which is to feel successful and make progress.

7 Define Your Most Essential Learning Objectives

Lastly, as you think about student learning itself, step back and think about first principles. What are your big objectives for student learning? At a fundamental level, what do you most want students to know and have mastered by the end of the year? This isn't about the stuff schools were planning on teaching. It's about defining the most essential outcomes and making tradeoffs about what you *won't* be able to do or teach.

From there, help teachers focus on how they will know if students have attained mastery of those core objectives. How should they assess mastery? This is not only important to facilitating the learning experience now, it will also be vital when students return in the fall. Teachers will need to figure out how to serve students who will likely have greater than usual differences in the amount of material each has learned or retained, and to personalize learning accordingly (and avoid the conversation around holding back large numbers of students).

Knowing core objectives will help teachers begin to design the daily and weekly learning experiences that will deliver on those objectives, with room for customization given different student and family realities and needs.

After that, you can think more deeply about how you will deliver that instruction and decide what tools you will use—curriculum, software, hardware, broadband connectivity, and the like. As you select tools, before assuming teachers will have to build lessons themselves, find out what already-created lessons are out there now. New Schools Venture Fund and other places have established lists of stellar free resources created with significant teacher and instructional designer input. Think about how to make the tools mesh so there is coherence across the curriculum.

Above All—*Engage!*

Above all else, make sure teachers create active learning experiences that invite learners to engage constantly. Avoid at all cost lectures and long lessons with passive learning experiences. Figure out how to engage learners in interesting questions that will draw them in and harness their motivations so they can drive their own learning—whether or not they're physically in the school. EL

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L.A. in Action: A Multi-Pronged Approach to Distance Learning

How the nation's second largest district is retooling to lift remote learning and support families in need.

Large urban school districts have faced daunting challenges in providing continued learning and support during the coronavirus shutdown, given the sheer size and diverse needs of their student populations. To address these challenges, the 600,000-student Los Angeles Unified School District has taken an ambitious, multi-faceted approach to staying connected with students and families.

Late last month, shortly after its schools closed, the district launched a $100-million emergency fund to support its transition to remote learning. The school system's goal, according to Darnise Williams, a senior director in the office of the superintendent, is to be able to provide "robust instruction" while also bolstering the safety net for its students, many of whom are from low-income households.

To this end, the district has undertaken a range of interconnected outreach initiatives that, taken together, show how much is involved—and at stake—in supporting diverse student populations at this time. Among other things, L.A. Unified has:

■ *Provided extended learning plans to all students.* The packets, derived from teachers' existing lesson plans, include both online and pen-and-paper activities. Students can also participate in regular online discussions with their teachers.

■ *Launched an educational programming partnership with local PBS television stations.* The cross-grade-level programming features supplemental, standards-based instructional materials developed by district educators and now reaches more than 200,000 people a day.

RAY_OF_LIGHT / SHUTTERSTOCK

■ *Forged an agreement with Verizon to provide free wireless internet access to all students.* The district estimates that as many as 100,000 of its students did not have internet access on their own.

■ *Began distribution of free digital devices to students who need them.* The program started at the high school level, with school leaders reaching out to students in need of computers and schools serving as distribution sites. The goal is for every student in the district to have an internet-connected device with access to the district's learning-management system and communication platforms like Zoom and Google Hangouts.

■ *Provided intensive training in online instruction to teachers.* Characterized by Superintendent Austin Beutner as the "main event," the additional professional learning, led by educators with previous experience in distance learning, is designed to share best practices and help teachers adapt instructional plans to an online environment. The district also plans to set up technical-support help desks for teachers, students, and families.

■ *Opened more than 60 "grab n' go" food centers in schools.* The centers, staffed by district employees and Red Cross volunteers, have provided more than 5 million meals, in addition to toys and baby supplies for families.

■ *Created new services for students with disabilities.* Occupational therapists and speech and language teachers are working with students via teleconferencing. In addition, special educators are creating pre-recorded video lessons for other students with special needs.

The district has also created a mental health hotline for students and caregivers and started a charitable fund for students and families in need.

Despite all its efforts, the Los Angeles district is still struggling to reach all its students. In an address to the school community delivered on March 30, Superintendent Beutner said that about 68 percent of the district's 120,000 high school students were participating in online learning on a given day and that there were some 15,000 high school students with whom the district has had no online contact since schools closed.

The wide-ranging steps L. A. Unified has taken show how much is involved—and at stake—in supporting students at this time.

But these gaps, Beutner said, would serve to redouble the district's commitment to continuing its outreach, including by working with community organizations. "It's simply not acceptable that we lose touch with 15,000 young adults or that many students aren't getting the education they should be," he said.

Beutner also said that the district's rapid transition to online learning, though akin to doing complex maintenance on an airplane at 30,000 feet, could ultimately have long-term benefits for students. "The jobs of the future will also require them to share knowledge and ideas, collaborate, provide and receive feedback on how to improve and turn all of this into action—while online," he noted. EL

—Anthony Rebora

ASCD Community in ACTION

ASCD's mission—*to empower educators to achieve excellence in learning, teaching, and leading so that every child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged*—has never been more important. So we are grateful to see that school districts across the country are leveraging ASCD's digital resources to provide professional learning during school closures. Below are some insights from district PD directors on how they are using ASCD's Activate and PD In Focus® products to provide customized, remote-access support to teachers.

Glenda Horner, executive director of staff development in the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District in Texas, on ASCD's Activate Professional Learning Library:

ASCD ACTIVATE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING LIBRARY

How was Activate used to support staff's professional learning prior to the COVID-19-related closures?

Initially, Activate provided us the *convenience* of accessing high-quality professional development in an online environment with 24/7 access. For our educators, the nontraditional idea of "pulling" what you need when you need it, rather than the traditional method of "pushing" professional development toward them, was very inviting. We layered it onto existing practices and used it to promote and enhance professional learning that integrates with campus initiatives and meets individual teacher needs.

How has Activate been able to continue to support professional learning for your staff during the COVID-19 crisis?

In our current reality, Activate has moved from a *convenience* to a *necessity*. Just as the district provides continuity of instruction for our students, Activate allows us to offer professional-learning continuity for our educators. Providing relevant and purposeful professional development is a hallmark of our district, and the digital tools within Activate allow us to continue to do so.

What aspects of Activate are of most value to you today?

The most-used tools continue to be PD In Focus and PD Online. We affectionately refer to PD In Focus as the Netflix of professional development because the online platform features short video segments showing research-based teaching practices in action. PD Online features courses that are built on the work of some of ASCD's top experts and authors. Both tools allow educators to personalize their learning and even break that learning into smaller bite-sized pieces.

What are three adjectives you would use to describe Activate?

Engaging, relevant, and research-based.

To learn more about Activate, visit www.ascd.org/activate.

Carmen S. Concepción, executive director of teacher leadership and development in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida, on ASCD's PD In Focus video-based online learning platform.

How was PD In Focus used to support staff's professional learning prior to the COVID-19 crisis?

PD In Focus was primarily used as a resource for school and district-based collaborative professional development opportunities. It is a resource used by teachers as part of their Deliberate Practice Growth Target to continue to grow their expertise. Individual channels have been created to highlight distinct district initiatives. Some of the videos included in the district channels were recorded in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and highlight the work of our teachers.

Professional learning support teams at each school have created channels and uploaded personalized videos that meet the needs of the teachers at their school. We have also used PD In Focus to host webinars developed by the district on best resources for promoting ethical standards. Finally, we've used PD In Focus as a resource platform to further enhance the district's partnership with the local institutions of higher education that prepare our pre-service teachers.

How has PD In Focus been able to continue to support professional learning for your staff during COVID-19 closures?

Undoubtedly, the global novel coronavirus pandemic has changed the manner in which teachers participate in professional learning. To provide instructional personnel additional support, six online professional learning courses have been developed using videos and resources from PD In Focus that are aligned to our district's Framework of Effective Instruction. We are also extending the availability of PD In Focus to our entire workforce for training and development. We are in turn transforming the remote work environment into one that allows us to focus on capacity building via online learning to our employees across the school district. Our goal is to continue to work with PD In Focus to secure additional resources for our school support personnel as we are rolling out a districtwide professional development menu for our paraprofessionals, temporary instructors, interventionists, custodians, security monitors, food service personnel, and clerical workers.

What aspects of PD In Focus are of most value today?

The most important aspect of PD In Focus is that our teachers have access to a myriad of research-based videos and resources 24/7. The videos and resources can be differentiated to meet the individual needs of each teacher and are aligned to our district's Framework of Effective Instruction. They can be used to personalize professional learning within a safe platform.

What are three adjectives to describe PD In Focus?

Accessible, personalized, differentiated.

To learn more about PD In Focus, visit www.ascd.org/pdinfocus.

Three Strategies for Better ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

How can we encourage students to go deeper in digital discussions?

Michael B. Sherry

What does it take to make online discussions work?

Online learning management systems provide opportunities for students to continue discussions beyond the space and time of a regular class period. However, online discussion forums differ from classroom conversations. Notably, they require students to participate in discussion by writing, rather than speaking. Contributing and responding in writing can have both advantages and disadvantages for students. Some may appreciate having more time to compose their thoughts and may be more likely to participate than they would in face-to-face discussions. Alternatively, those who struggle with writing may be frustrated, and without the nonverbal cues of facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice, misunderstandings can easily arise. Finally, students may draw on their experiences, for better or for worse, with social media discussion forums.

Below are three strategies for addressing these challenges.

1 Provide Clear Participation Guidelines

The following questions can help you generate guidelines (with or without student input) for online participation:

1. What is the purpose of the online discussion?
2. What practices will help students accomplish that purpose?
3. What would "good" participation look like?

For example, in most face-to-face discussions, regulating word choice and syntax is less important than encouraging participation. So, if the purpose of the online discussion is to generate enthusiastic conversation, rather than academic text for a subsequent assignment, you might consider allowing informal language and not evaluating grammar and style. In fact, the use of informal language and other visual features (like emoji ☺) may be one way writers attempt to build rapport with readers in the absence of verbal resources like tone of voice and facial expressions.

2 Show Students How to Participate

Asking students to make a post and reply to two others tells them what to do, but not how. Here are two practices, with examples, for modeling how to promote and sustain discussion:

■ *Ask good questions*: When students ask questions that invite multiple, complex interpretations—open, higher-order thinking (O-HOT) questions—they spark more responses and more substantive discussion. Sadly, students may be more used to answering one-right-answer recall questions and so they may, when prompted, ask these same kinds of closed, lower-order thinking (C-LOT) questions that can block further conversation. Figure 1 shows examples of questions you can use to help students formulate genuine inquiries about events, characters, or a writer's choices (Applebee et al., 2003; Cambridge Primary Review Trust, 2017).

■ *Take up what someone else has written:* When students quote or refer back to what others have already written in their responses, they are more likely to generate subsequent discussion. Responses that include this kind of "uptake" (see fig. 2) may quote words and employ pronouns like "this/that" and "I/you/he/she/it," as in "You said that . . ." or "What makes you think that?" (Nystrand et al., 1997).

3 Help Students Use Visual Strategies to Make Better Connections

The visual design of discussion boards can inhibit connections. To tie a post or a reply to more than one idea, as we so often do in face-to-face conversation, may mean responding in two different "threads"—those hierarchical chains typical of online discussion forums. Additionally, threaded discussions require that, in order to follow the flow of the conversation, students must scroll down or click multiple times—another obstacle to participating. Below are three visual strategies for helping students weave better connections during threaded discussions:

■ Encourage students to use names when referring to what others have already written. This way, they can reference more than one contributor. Additionally, seeing one's own name while scrolling down the page makes a writer want to stop and respond.

■ Invent a font-style system with students for indicating types of responses or changes in topic. For example, *italicizing disagreement*, **bolding a new argument**, or using a particular color for each topic can draw attention to those moments and invite responses.

■ Students may have their own symbol systems for creating connections, thanks to social media discussion forums (e.g., @name for citing a previous speaker or #topic for indicating a new/existing idea). If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. ☺

Clear guidelines, generative models, and flexible visual strategies can make it easier for students to participate in online discussions. As such forums become increasingly associated with public, civic discourse, beyond the classroom, teaching students to participate in them productively is a worthy goal. EL

Editors' note: This article originally appeared in the April 2020 issue of Educational Leadership.

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FIGURE 1. Types of Questions by Openness and Order of Thinking

Open, higher-order thinking
"What made you think that?"

Open, lower-order thinking
"When you read this, what did you think?"

Closed, higher-order thinking
"At this part, what does the author want you to think?

Closed, lower-order thinking
"Did this part make you think A or B?"

FIGURE 2. Statements That Include Uptake of Previous Responses

Quoting/paraphrasing:
"**You** said **that** . . ."

Probing:
"What makes **you** think **that**?""

Agreeing/Disagreeing:
"I disagree with **his** point **that** . . ."

Clarifying:
"What did **she** mean by **that**?"

Source: Michael B. Sherry

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A BRAVE NEW WORLD: A Teacher's Take on Surviving Distance Learning

How to preserve your curriculum—and sanity—in this unprecedented time.

Alexis Wiggins

These past weeks have felt like months as we've struggled to adapt to this new global reality. For many of us in education, it has also meant adapting to new ways of teaching, learning, and communicating. I have been forced to learn or figure out how to use more technology in the past two weeks than I probably have in the past two years of classroom teaching. Necessity is the mother of invention.

While I think of myself as an educator who is open to technology, I have been surprised by how time-consuming full-time online teaching can be. A simple check for understanding in the classroom that takes seconds can now take hours—or even days. For example, it takes longer to get in touch

with a student online who hasn't turned in her homework. Before I could just see her in class and ask her to stay after with me to work on it or submit it to me by the end of the day. As we adapt to new communication modes, as well as new methods of teaching and assessing, we spend enormous amounts of time and energy acclimating. I don't know about other educators, but I'm sleeping more hours at night, and I believe it's due to the heavy cognitive load I'm processing day in and out with remote learning.

There are, however, bright spots in this brave new world of distance education: I've never been so grateful for my colleagues and team members; I am buoyed by the enthusiasm of students when we meet online; and I'm learning a lot of new skills that I think will benefit my classroom in the long run.

Four Lessons Learned

Our private preK–12 school outside of Houston, Texas, was on spring break when the decision was made not to return to school. The administration first decided to close for one week and then reassess based on state and local recommendations. But within that first week, it was evident that we'd need to shut down for longer. Therefore, the administrators devised a plan to ease us all into online learning in three phases.

In Phase 1, our first week of distance learning, teachers had Monday and Tuesday to begin to learn technology like Zoom and Microsoft Teams to help us prepare and meet together online. By Wednesday, we were asked to post 3–4 hours of work for students to be able to do on their own through that first weekend. Phase 2 began in our second week of distance learning: we planned one synchronous meeting per class based on our actual bell schedule to avoid overlap. This allowed us to virtually check in with our students. The following week launched Phase 3: the Upper School deans designed a modified schedule with (3) 45-minute class periods a day of synchronous class time via Zoom or other platforms that we had already been using in the classroom.

This slow rollout helped us transition to this new mode of teaching and learning more smoothly. We're currently well into Phase 3, and things are chugging along. While we've had some tech pitfalls and teaching challenges over the past month, I feel we've grown a lot from this experience. To that end, I'd like to share what's worked and how I have adapted my planned curriculum to a virtual environment. Here are a few of the salient insights I've gained:

When we transitioned to online learning, it was a stressful time and I didn't know how I'd handle the volume of work while also managing homeschooling for my two children.

1 *Relying on a Team Reduces Work and Stress*

Having a team with which to share a lot of this planning is a boon. I work on a team with three other teachers for a 10th grade English course. We are used to meeting weekly to plan, calibrate assessments, and debrief together. I didn't realize how helpful it would be to have a team to rely on to share the load in this new environment. The sudden shift to online teaching was incredibly time consuming: typing all the instructions, adding rubrics to grading programs like Turnitin, posting assignments on course learning management systems, and linking resources on hyperdocs can take up a whole day.

In our first Zoom meeting, my 10th grade team and I planned out a unit, and we naturally fell into different roles: one teacher, Ginger, took notes in a Google Doc pacing guide so we could keep track of our thinking and new schedule; another colleague, Katie, added links to outside resources that we wanted to share with students; and a third teacher, Stephen, shared tools and tutorials to get us up to speed. I recall coming away from that first meeting feeling such relief that I could share this work with a trusted group of professionals to ease some of the burden. I wasn't alone in my "social isolation."

Now, this isn't always possible. I teach a senior English course as well, and I'm on my own for that class, so I sympathize with the many educators who aren't part of a team. I have to spend more time working through those lesson plans. If this is the case for you, consider reaching out to administrators, instructional coaches, tech coaches, and librarians who can help you, especially if the tech is overwhelming. Recently, I scheduled a Zoom meeting with my whole department, during which our school librarian helped us test out Zoom's features like breakout rooms, chats, and whiteboards.

I am already a stronger, nimbler, more adaptable teacher today than I was a few weeks ago.

2 ***Connecting with Students Boosts Morale***

Leading up to our first online class with students, my colleagues and I were feeling a bit exhausted from the increased screen time and the frantic learning of new technology. But that first connection with students left all of us feeling buoyed. "This is why we do our jobs!" we remembered. It isn't about the curriculum, the assessment, or the tech; it's about the kids. Seeing the students in real time and listening to their stories, questions, and concerns helped remind us of that.

Use any technology available, even snail mail, to try to connect with your students. I have heard uplifting stories of teachers in under-resourced schools writing letters or delivering supplies to students at home who can't connect online. I have also heard from so many of my students—who all have laptops available to them—that they had never realized how much they could miss their classes, peers, and teachers until reuniting with them again online.

3 ***Learning New Technology Isn't So Bad***

I consider myself a somewhat enthusiastic tech adopter in the regular classroom; I'm no stranger to hyperdocs, online grading, or Twitter chats, but I'm not usually the first to adopt a new tech tool or the most enthusiastic cheerleader for classroom-technology use. While I like how technology has enhanced what I do in the classroom, sometimes I feel a sense of fatigue at the thought of learning *another* new platform.

That has changed pretty quickly in these past few weeks. Now I need as many tools as possible to help us carry out the skills we were able to do easily in the classroom together. Thanks to my colleague Stephen's tech savviness, I have ventured into the world of Microsoft Teams, one-take-videos, and screencasts, and I will never look back. The initial inertia I felt at adopting new formats was quickly overridden by watching other colleagues around me adopt these platforms and get them up and running in no time. I was able to check in with Stephen and our equally tech-savvy librarian several times a day to troubleshoot as I tried out these new tools, making the process relatively painless. Adopting new tech tools with colleagues' support has helped our 10th grade team keep our original curriculum running pretty smoothly.

For example, around this time of year, our team asks students to do a media bias workshop during class, then we "think/pair/share" for a bit and have a large class discussion of the students' takeaways. We didn't want to give up on this essential lesson and its deep learning ahead of a big research paper assignment, so we worked together to adapt the lesson to a digital format.

Our team decided to have students complete the workshop for homework instead of in class. The students submitted their answers to Microsoft Teams so we could get a sense of their individual learning. From there, we wanted them to share their takeaways, and Stephen introduced us to the concept of a "one-take" video—a short, unpolished video that students make of their key understandings from a resource or assignment. We researched the best technology for students to do this and landed on FlipGrid, which we all set up within a half hour. Several of us had heard of FlipGrid

from colleagues but hadn't had a moment to test it out or use it in the classroom. Finally, we met with our classes either live in Zoom or on a discussion-board platform called Parlay Ideas to share and discuss students' takeaways and questions.

The learning was just as strong, if not better, than in our live classroom setting from past years. We feel that we didn't sacrifice many of the understandings or key takeaways; rather, students were able to show their learning in new ways that they found fun and engaging, deepening the experience.

4 ***Model Being a Lifelong Learner***

When we transitioned to online learning, it was a stressful time and I didn't know how I'd handle the volume of work while also managing homeschooling for my two children. Still, when my administration suggested we sign up for a course on designing online learning from the Global Online Academy (GOA), I decided to enroll—and I'm glad now that I did. I learned quite a bit in that first week that directly informed my online teaching for the better, and it was well worth the 20–30 minutes a day I spent on the course. For example, a colleague and I were introduced to Loom on the GOA's course and I used it to make my first screencast to show students how to do an annotated bibliography.

If taking a full online course isn't an option for you, GOA also has a COVID-19 Resource Page with practical suggestions, graphics, and articles.

Additionally, if you are an educator and haven't yet joined Twitter, you're missing out on tons of excellent, free professional development. Some of my best lessons have come from ideas educators and consultants have shared on Twitter (currently, #distancelearning is a useful hashtag to follow.

Finally, included here is a brief list of my favorite tech tools. While some I have been using for years, their utility *now* has never been more apparent.

None of this work has come without a good amount of time and frustration, but I've been pleasantly surprised to see a clear silver lining: I am already a stronger, nimbler, more adaptable teacher today than I was a few weeks ago. We are all feeling the worry and strain, but I feel certain that when we find our even keel again, as a world and a profession, many of us will return to the classroom better poised to help our students learn. EL

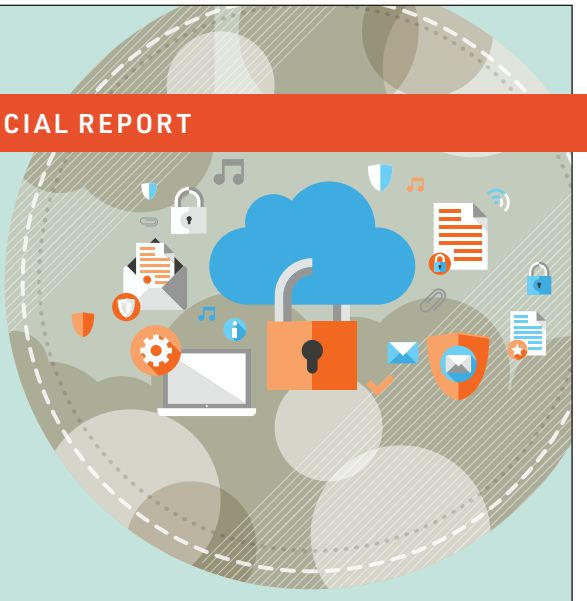
That first connection with students left all of us feeling buoyed. "This is why we do our jobs!" we remembered.

Alexis Wiggins is the founder and director of the Cohort of Educators for Essential Learning and the author of *The Best Class You Never Taught: How Spider Web Discussion Can Turn Students into Learning Leaders* (ASCD, 2017). Alexis currently serves as the English Department Chair at The John Cooper School in The Woodlands, TX. Follow her on Twitter @AlexisWiggins or subscribe to her newsletter.

Favorite Tech Tools

These have been the most helpful tools in adapting my teaching to a completely online setting:

- Loom – screencasting made *very* simple
- FlipGrid – students create quick videos in response to your prompts
- Parlay Ideas – robust discussion boards; these are a mainstay in my regular classroom
- Zoom – great for class meetings and real-time discussions
- Turnitin – online grading with QuickMarks has been a huge boon while at home
- Microsoft Teams – this one had the steepest learning curve for me, but now I like to use it for chatting with students or quick homework checks



CYBERSECURITY

Guidelines for Remote Learning

Technology keeps us connected to our students—but how can we ensure it's safe?

In our current education reality, where remote learning is the norm, new challenges to student privacy and cybersecurity are emerging. The scramble to switch to technology to connect with students has exposed issues that can jeopardize school and student privacy. Classroom discussions, conference calls, and other meetings have been hacked by pranksters and trolls, and in some cases recorded and posted to the open web.

Fortunately, resources to address these challenges are quickly becoming available to help guide educators. CoSN (Consortium for School Networking), a nonprofit that helps education leaders leverage technology for engaging learning environments, has released several briefs, checklist, and guidelines to help schools ensure their new virtual environments are safe and secure.

In one brief, CoSN offers specific guidelines for school officials to consider before setting up a video conferencing tool for teachers. Recommendations include:

- Avoid setting up a video conference system that requires students to create accounts.
- Remember that audio and video recordings of an individual must be protected in accordance with federal and state law and your school system policies.
- When possible, avoid recording classroom discussions with students. Ask teachers to pre-record their lessons without students present, which further minimizes the privacy risks to students.
- Provide information to parents about why you're using the technology and how you're protecting student data privacy.
- Give parents the ability to opt their child out of participating in video sessions and have alternative connection methods available for those students who need it.

In a separate brief, "Cybersecurity Considerations in a COVID-19 World," CoSN provides a broader overview of security and privacy issues that schools should be aware of when transitioning to remote learning. The tips include:

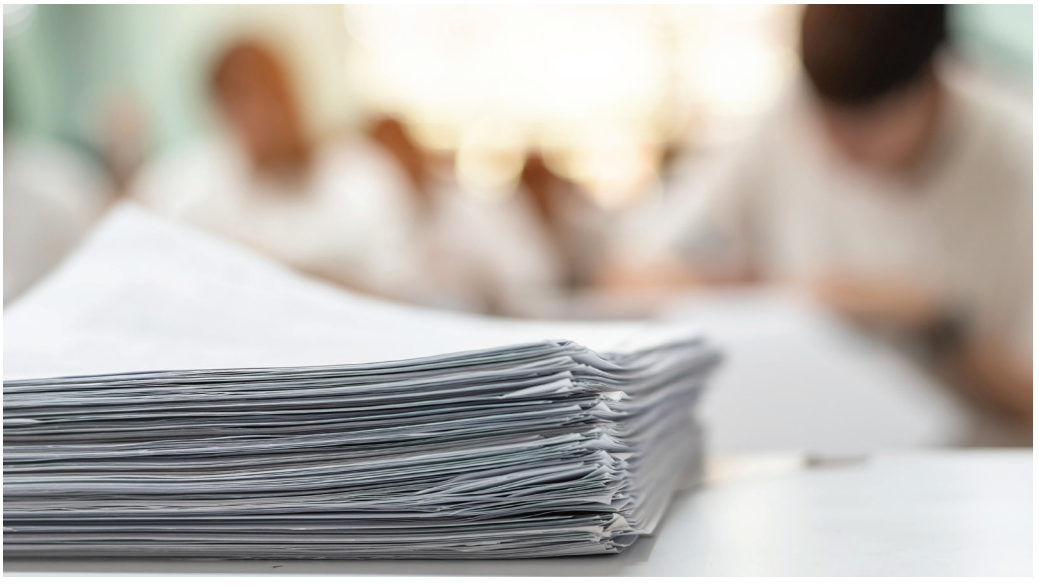
- Avoid sending emails to staff, students, and parents that contain links.
- Review district procedures and guidelines regarding non-employee use of district devices. Can family members use a staff device? What if the family member is a student using it to access remote learning materials?
- Remind teachers, staff, students, and parents that IT staff will never ask for their login credentials via email or threaten to turn off access to school accounts if they don't click on a link.
- Consider implementing two-factor or multi-factor authentication whenever possible.
- Examine the privacy concerns for both students and teachers of turning on a webcam in a private home.

In an *Educational Leadership* article last February, CoSN project director Linnette Attai writes, "Protecting the privacy of student data is an undeniably complex undertaking." This statement could not be truer right now during the pandemic crisis. EL

—Tara Laskowski
Senior Editor,
Educational Leadership

MACROVECTOR/ SHUTTERSTOCK

To Grade or Not to Grade?



How districts can enact fair and equitable grading policies during the coronavirus closures.

Joe Feldman

In the interests of protecting the health and safety of our communities from the coronavirus, schools are closing their doors, not only through the end of spring break, but beyond, some even until the end of this school year.

Among other issues, this brings up the question of grading. Because the grades students receive are used for many high-stakes decisions—course placement, graduation, scholarships, college admission, etc.—policymakers and district leaders are looking for expert guidance on whether, and how, to grade students during this very challenging time.

The grading recommendations provided below are grounded in research on effective evaluation, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and my organization's (Crescendo Education Group) work in multiple geographic and socioeconomic contexts. They also incorporate feedback from teachers and school and district leaders.

These recommendations are based on three major factors:

CHINNAPONG / SHUTTERSTOCK

No grades should be awarded as of the date schools were closed due to the coronavirus.

1 Stress related to COVID-19 will negatively impact student academic performance.

Everyone is affected by the stress of the global pandemic, and this stress is expected to grow as the number of people infected, and who become sick or die, increases. It will become more likely that each of us will know someone or have family members with the coronavirus. Plus, the economic impact of this crisis will become more severe, with more people out of work and requiring financial assistance. Not only has research directly linked parents' job losses to lower student performance, but economic strain within a family adds stress and anxiety, which creates additional adverse consequences such as increased domestic violence (Hoge, 2020).

While schools often provide some measure of mental health services, students are now unable to access them. Additionally, the health- and economic-related stress caused by the coronavirus will likely be disproportionately felt by students in lower-income families, who are more vulnerable to economic downturns and more likely to experience food and housing insecurity. We also know that grades themselves are a significant source of stress to students and will only exacerbate the pressure they already are experiencing.

Finally, stress and anxiety hampers cognition, particularly with higher-demand tasks involved in learning (Vogel, 2020). Students will be unable to process new material or demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of course content. Their performance on quizzes, tests, or other assessments will assuredly be compromised and will not accurately reflect their learning. This impact will be more acutely felt by lower-income students and those with special needs.

2 Student academic performance during school closures is more likely to reflect racial, economic, and resource differences.

Many schools have entirely shifted to remote instruction, and never in the history of our country has a student's learning been so dependent on home technological resources—a situation that has exposed glaring inequities (Reilly, 2020; Sonali, 2020). Some students do not have consistent access to technology because of a lack of computers or internet access in their homes. In addition, families with several school-age children may require multiple computers and higher bandwidth.

We also know that parents who have a higher education background or who have more resources are able to provide more academic supports for their children, immediately and over the long haul. During school closures, parents (including teachers) have been asked to assume more responsibilities to support and even teach their children, which means that the capacity of parents to support remote instruction will now have a greater influence on students' learning.

And there is another complicating dynamic: Parents who are in the health or medical professions or who provide other "essential" products or services—including hourly employees in public transit, sanitation, grocery stores, and pharmacies—are less available to their children than parents in other professions during this critically important time.

Schools always strive to provide sufficient supports to students to compensate for differences in family resources and level the playing field. But in this new context, most schools are unable to do that as effectively, thereby exacerbating these disparities. The inequitable result is that students' academic performance will reflect their home environments more tightly than ever.

3 Most teachers have not been adequately prepared to provide high-quality instruction remotely.

Even among our most dedicated teachers, most

have received little, if any, preparation to provide distance-learning instruction. Effective online learning requires carefully tailored instructional design and planning, using a specialized model for design and development (Hodges et al., 2020). It is more than using online learning applications (which, for some teachers, pose a very steep learning curve), it's not simply having students progress through their school class schedule in virtual classes all day long, and it's not just posting worksheets and readings on a website. Yet these rudimentary translations of in-class teaching may be the best that most teachers can do, given that they themselves are also likely grappling with the significant stress and anxiety of physical distancing and the health and safety of their families.

Plus, with students doing all of their work outside the classroom, it is impossible for a teacher to ensure that any work submitted is entirely the student's; it could be the performance of an older sibling, a parent, or even a peer.

Grading in a Time of Crisis

We are living in a difficult, unprecedented period, and educators are working hard each day to do the best for their students and provide learning in adaptive ways. Based on the three factors just described, my grading recommendations for school districts in this time of crisis are as follows:

Summary Recommendation

Because grades describing student knowledge and understanding of course standards will assuredly be inaccurate during this time, ***no grades should be awarded as of the date schools were closed due to the coronavirus.*** This is especially important for lower ages (kindergarten through 9th grade), when grades have far less consequence.

Use Only Pass/Incomplete Grades

If grades do need to be awarded—such as at the high school and postsecondary levels—the only grades for the second semester of the school year should be either "Pass" or "Incomplete"

Students' academic performance will reflect their home environments more tightly than ever.

instead of the traditional 0–100 percentages and *A–F* letter grades. Schools use percentages and letter grades primarily to distinguish among students and suggest precise distinctions of course content knowledge, but this specificity is impossible when such significant doubts exist about the integrity or fairness of student performance data. Letter and percentage grades also can add stress and anxiety to students, and Pass/Incomplete grades give students some relief during this extremely stressful time.

A student should receive a "Pass" for the second semester if, at the time her school was closed due to the coronavirus, she was meeting minimum standards in a course. Any student who was not meeting minimum standards in the course up to that point should have the opportunity to fulfill the requirements remotely and receive a "Pass" for the course. If a student is unable to meet the requirements for whatever reason, they should receive an "Incomplete" for the course and, when schools reopen, be provided sufficient opportunity to fulfill requirements. Yearlong courses in which semester grades are normally combined should be bifurcated into two separate reports—a letter grade for first semester and a Pass/Incomplete for second semester.

If Grades Are Necessary, Make Them Temporary

If the school or district context requires that an *A–F* letter grade must be assigned, schools should explicitly frame the grade as a *temporary description* of what a student has demonstrated based on incomplete information. The district should provide opportunities, once schools reopen, for a student to learn the course content and improve the grade assigned during the school closure period.

Don't Leave the Choice of Grading to the Student

Several universities and colleges are allowing

students at the end of this semester to decide whether a course should be Pass/No Pass or graded *A*–*F*. This apparently reasonable compromise actually perpetuates inequities; it gives students with access to technology and resources the advantage of being able to earn a letter grade, while the less-resourced student cannot realistically exercise that choice.

Have Students Sign an Integrity Agreement

Districts and schools should ask students to sign a "remote academic integrity agreement" in which they promise that all work submitted was completed without any additional assistance, unless specified by the teacher. This agreement helps the school or district reaffirm its expectations for students and increases students' investment in their learning. It also builds teachers' confidence that the work students submit is their own. Of particular importance during this crisis is that educators consider and use these agreements not as "gotcha" traps to disqualify student work, but rather as a tool to build responsibility and trusting relationships.

Continue Providing Feedback on Performance

Teachers should continue to give detailed feedback to students on their performance, to support learning. Teacher feedback could be communicated through online meetings or web-based applications, and will give students valuable insight into their understanding, guidance on how to improve, and motivation to learn and grow. Research supports the impact of nongraded feedback to focus students on learning rather than performance (Butler & Mordecai, 1986), and when the psychological and intellectual "load" on students and their families is so significant, it is important that schools lean on the side of support and learning rather than competition and high-stakes performance.

Students, Not Grades, Come First

Once a grading policy is decided on, districts and schools should issue a statement to families that explains the policy and how it aligns with their overarching beliefs about learning, equity, and children. Several policymakers and superintendents are already implementing these policies. For example, the superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia announced that because some children are not able to access technology or complete assignments, teachers cannot require or evaluate any remote work. Both Virginia and Kansas schools, which are physically closed for the remainder of the school year, have also stated that student work should not be graded during this time. If parents and others are concerned about whether or not awarding traditional grades will make their children less competitive or eligible for opportunities (e.g., scholarships and college admission), school leaders should reassure them that it is almost certain that institutions that make decisions based on grades—such as colleges and the NCAA—will make adjustments and allowances because of the global upheaval caused by COVID-19.

During this challenging and stressful time, it is important to act in the best interests of children. The only way schools can properly recognize the almost unimaginable stress and anxiety that the coronavirus has and will have our communities is to *not evaluate and assign grades for remote learning* during the remainder of the 2019–20 school year. In this way, we affirm that all grades must be accurate, that they must be equitable and, most of all, that they support learning. EL

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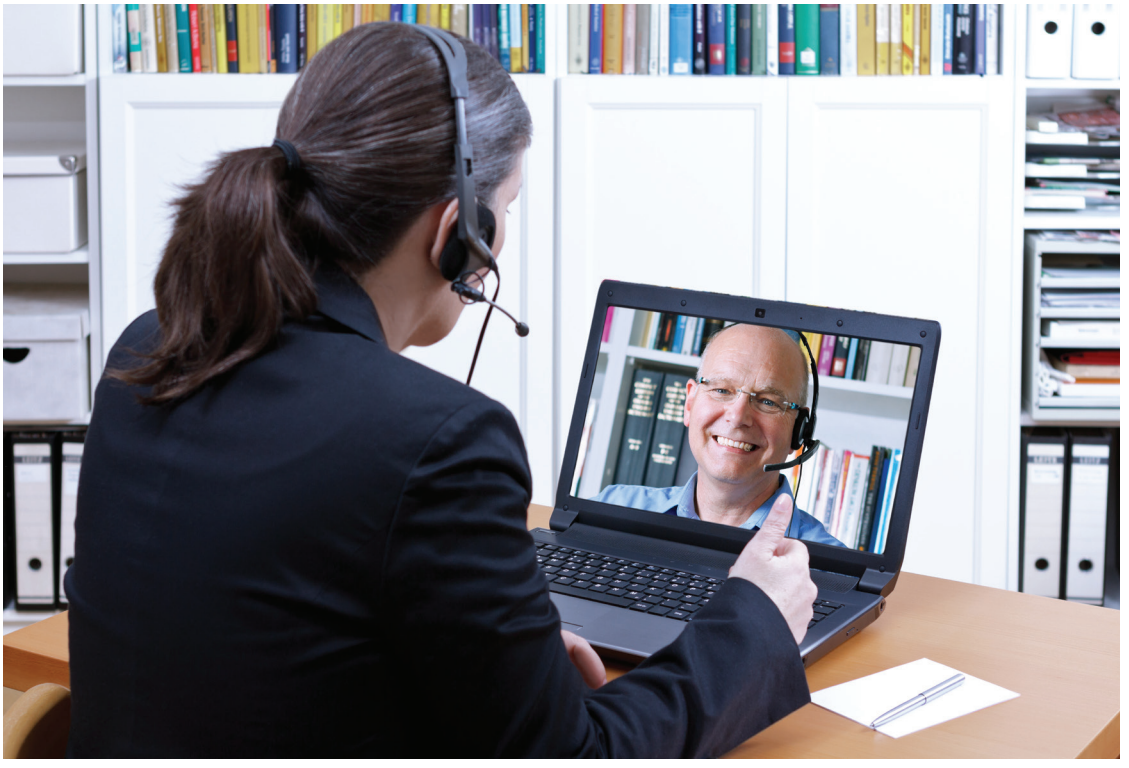

TEACHER COLLABORATION During a Global Pandemic

Five tips for virtual planning from international educators.

Andrea Honigsfeld and Jon Nordmeyer

How can staying farther apart bring us closer together? Millions of families around the world—and the many dedicated educators who continue to serve them—are navigating school closures and sudden shifts to new ways of learning due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. We are also seeing unprecedented global cooperation among educators. While collaboration in virtual spaces might not happen the same way as it does in person, connecting with each other, planning around diverse student needs, and figuring out what works has become essential in our current environment.

In many parts of the United States, remote learning has only just started; elsewhere it has become the new normal. We have been working to support professional learning in independent K–12 international schools around the world, many of which have been teaching and learning virtually for months. Both nationally and internationally, educators have been generously sharing what they have learned with us, as well as on Twitter, Facebook, FlipGrid, YouTube, and other digital platforms.

Below, we outline five key takeaways from this work. While these recommendations initially grew out of teaching English learners, we believe they can serve *all* learners.

Physical distancing cannot and should not mean professional isolation.

1 Take Care of Each Other

First and foremost, let's acknowledge that this new normal is *not* normal. As human beings we seem to be more vulnerable than ever before. As educators, this time we really do not have all the answers. What we do have, however, is each other. Physical distancing cannot and should not mean professional isolation. Just the opposite: We need to start by supporting each other, our students, and their families. As we work together, we not only need to focus on student learning, but also on the overall well-being of our colleagues through empathy, honesty, and generosity.

As we collaborate with colleagues, we can offer social-emotional support and lead honest conversations about what works and what doesn't in this new learning environment. We can share everything: teacher-created materials, freely available resources, curated course content, successes, challenges, and even total fails. For example, Alycia Owen, at the American International School of Guangzhou, China, recently shared best-practice ideas on Twitter for staying connected with students and families, as well as maintaining personal and professional interactions with colleagues. Many educators have looked to their professional learning networks on social media for encouragement through virtual book clubs, Twitter chats, or wellness challenges.

In the weeks and months ahead, we must consider: What can we do for others? and How can we fully embrace the ethics of care? (Held, 2006) At the core of this principle is educational altruism, or selfless concern for other educators, students, and their families.

2 Plan to Collaborate *and* Collaborate to Plan

In the past, some teachers might have appreciated the autonomy that closing their classroom door provided them. But in this new context, most teachers don't want to go it alone. As a result, we have witnessed a seismic shift toward a more collaborative mindset. To both support and learn from colleagues, teachers can build in time each week to plan together. Whether working with a grade-level team, department colleague, or support specialist, two heads are better than one. This is especially true when navigating new waters.

A simple co-planning protocol (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018) has helped many international educators to structure this shared planning time more efficiently:

1. *Pre-planning to agree on norms:* When and how will we meet online, by text, phone, or other modalities? What will we discuss?
2. *Co-planning to ideate:* What will we teach and how will we assess? What will be the sequence of learning experiences?
3. *Post-planning to divide tasks:* Who will find or create specific resources? How will we differentiate?

Because digital practices are so portable, teachers can easily share resources with colleagues within the same school and across schools, countries, and even continents. We seem to have entered a new reality in which collaboration is no longer a luxury; instead, it is a lifeline that allows for teachers to learn about

new digital tools, to integrate new teaching activities (both high-tech and low-tech), and to share responsibility for creating online or take-home resources.

In this video, Alexandra Gustad from the American School of Bombay explains how teachers at her school co-plan. And in this video, Gina Ballesteros from the International School of Beijing shares how she co-plans to support multilingual learners in 2nd grade.

Collaboration is no longer a luxury. It is a lifeline.

3 Take an Asset-Based Approach

Rather than focusing on "remote" or "distance" or "virtual" classrooms, we can leverage teaching and *learning from home* as an asset. It is important to shift from a deficit-based view of the "challenge" of translating face-to-face instruction into an online classroom, to an asset-based view: finding new and different opportunities in home learning. When we highlight the assets of parents, siblings, pets, and the things around us that make up a home—rather than just a lonely student stuck in front of a screen—it helps us build on what we know about culturally sustaining pedagogy, place-based learning, and funds of knowledge. For example, when a student's home is multilingual, teachers can build on this resource by encouraging parents to read aloud or discuss assignments in their home language and inviting students to create multilingual projects. This approach helps us to recognize what we *can do* when learning goes home.

How can we make "learning at home" feel more real than virtual? What kinds of offline activities might support students? Teachers can find opportunities to connect curriculum and concepts to students' lived experiences and immediate environment. For example, students might interview siblings for a project or parents can join the classroom morning meeting. Students can also use pets or nearby objects to make connections with their learning. Meghan Wilson at Shekou International School in China shared on Twitter how her students and colleagues are staying connected, active, and creative at home.

4 Think in Chunks: Link Lessons, Resources, and Communication

Most teachers are in the process of building an entirely new online learning ecosystem, or, in the best-case scenario, repurposing an online platform that used to complement face-to-face teaching before the novel coronavirus-related school closures. Since there are so many resources available, teachers often utilize a combination of multiple apps, media, websites, and teacher-created content. This can get overwhelming fast. In order to avoid fragmentation or confusion, teachers can build connections across resources, activities, and lessons.

Building a one-stop shop and sharing a weekly learning plan with students and parents gives them a birds-eye view and road map of the curriculum. Tan Huynh at Saigon South International School in Vietnam shared how he uses a weekly learning plan or "week at a glance" to prepare students and parents for what lies ahead.

5 One Size Does Not Fit All

We know that every student is different. We also know that teaching a class with a variety of languages, cultures, abilities, and identities enriches the experience for all learners. In online classrooms, teachers must recognize the unique strengths and needs of every student by providing both *high challenge* and *high support* (Mariani, 1997). Every teacher and every school will adapt to the current reality differently based on their unique context and available resources. Teachers recognize the need to collaborate across borders and boundaries, to share what works and what doesn't. As teachers pay attention to linguistic diversity and neurodiversity in their classes, they can rely on the global education community to help provide options for students.

Equity is a critical consideration for online learning: Not all students have the same access to technology, and consistent high-speed internet may not be available in all homes. How can teachers collaborate to ensure learning activities and materials meet the needs of all learners? To ensure they're accessible and mobile-friendly? For example, PDFs are generally more accessible for students with disabilities who may rely on screen-readers.

Choices are an important key to unlocking access for all students in a virtual classroom. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that helps teachers to plan for multiple means of engagement, multiple modes of representations, and multiple ways for students to take action or express themselves. For example, Chelsea Wilson from Nansha College Preparatory Academy in China explains how she makes complex texts more accessible by using multilingual and multimodal resources. And Lindsay Kuhl from Seoul Foreign School in Korea shares how she scaffolds texts by using screencasting for guided reading.

Continue the Conversation

As the global K–12 landscape continues to evolve online, collaboration holds the promise of transforming professional relationships, with profound implications for everyone's learning (Nordmeyer, 2015). In the current circumstances, a historical preference for independence and autonomy may be replaced by reciprocal learning.

So let's all continue the conversation. Teachers from four continents are sharing their experiences teaching and collaborating on this FlipGrid page. As we learn together at home and around the world, join these global colleagues and share your insights, questions, or feedback. EL

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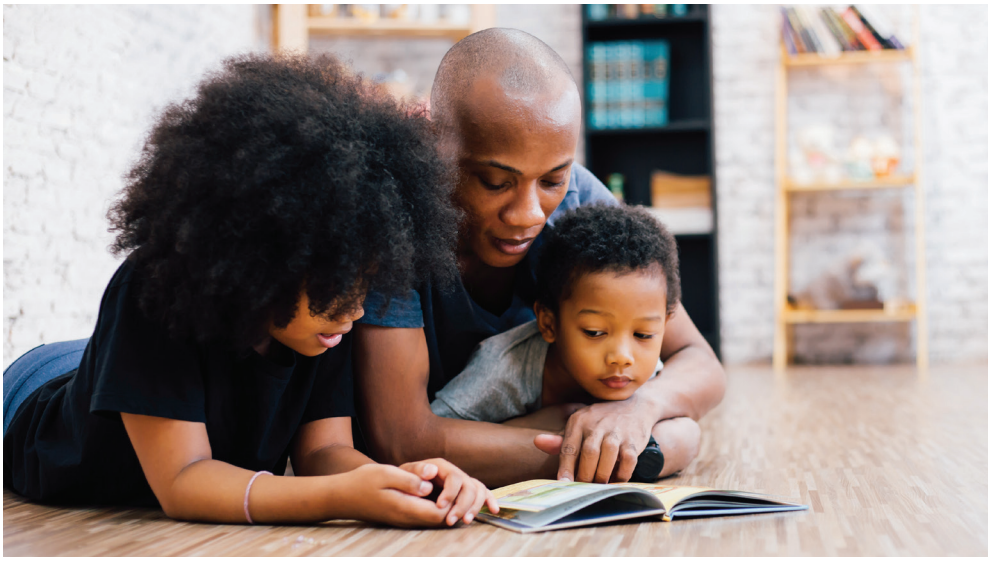
Why COVID-19 Is Our EQUITY CHECK



With students dispersed, schools and our society must confront long-simmering inequities.

Dena Simmons

During my childhood summers, my sisters and I stayed inside our one-bedroom apartment for days on end. Nice weather in our Bronx neighborhood meant more people socializing at bodegas and on building stoops, which often led to more troublemaking. If we ventured outside, there was always the chance of being hit by a stray bullet. Today, more than two decades later, the world is different, and though I am light years away from the one-bedroom apartment on Creston Avenue, I still carry with me the fear and anxiety from my own and our nation's past traumas.

As I sit in my apartment after days inside, having developed the stamina for a life indoors, I cannot help but thinking of our young people, who've grown up in a time of rampant school shootings, and who are now enduring the COVID-19 pandemic. Their school lessons ended abruptly—projects unfinished, conversations pending, graduations cancelled, and

pivotal experiences stolen. I worry about how our youth are feeling as they adjust to all their recent losses and our new normal, one characterized by social distancing.

And social distancing is not the same for everyone—for our students and adults alike. Although I was fortunate to grow up in a loving and nurturing home, some children risk abuse and violence more frequently now that they may be in the constant presence of their perpetrators.

With our new reliance on caregivers to support student learning, the urgency for schools to be more welcoming to families as partners has become far greater.

Others might have small homes like I did as a child, leaving little room to do anything without the distraction of relatives or siblings and the resulting frustration of having no personal space. Some students, conversely, are home all alone, since their caregivers do not have the privilege of jobs that keep them safely inside. A few might feel alienated by embarrassment about where they live, as I did during my boarding school years when my classmates' parents forbade them from dropping me off in what they referred to as my "dangerous" neighborhood.

Magnifying Existing Problems

Most of all, the novel coronavirus outbreak has put a mirror in front of our faces, magnifying the inequities in our school systems—and in our society—that too many of us have allowed to exist without question. Districts like New York City agonized over closing schools for far longer than they should have because officials had to confront an ethical dilemma: risk greater infections or put millions of children out on the streets, since many of them depend on schools not only for an education but also for food and basic supports, and some even for safe shelter during the day. The fact that closing schools presented such a challenge for districts nationally should be something that upsets us greatly.

Fortunately, many districts and schools are still offering free meals, but the safe haven and the opportunities for academic, social, and emotional learning are a bit more difficult to provide when everyone is dispersed. Some districts have provided children tablets, but there are still far too many students without the necessary tools for distance learning, including reliable internet service. For example, I recently heard about a 4th grade girl in Georgia named Trinity who started selling lemonade in her neighborhood to earn money for a computer so that she could participate in schoolwork. Jasmine Crowe, founder of Goodr, which aims to end hunger through minimizing food waste, encountered Trinity's stand and put her plea on Twitter. Within a day, people from across the country made donations, helping Trinity raise sufficient funds, and my friend Mary Jo Madda of Google even bought her a tablet. This is one beautiful story of the human spirit, but many more children will not be as lucky as Trinity. We should not have had to wait until a pandemic to provide all children with what they need to thrive as learners in and out of school.

Building Partnerships

During this fragile time, collaborations like the one that amplified Trinity's story are crucial. Thankfully, organizations like PCs for People and EveryoneOn have always worked to connect families to free and affordable computers and internet service. And now phone and cable and internet companies are stepping up to fill the digital gaps. But it is difficult not to wonder why we haven't invested in our young people's educational resources and access more generously before. This is a question we must ponder and continue to ask on the other side of the pandemic, especially since educational equity requires partnerships between groups—inside and outside of the school system.

One such partnership is with our students' families. With our new reliance on caregivers to

support student learning, the urgency to be more welcoming to families as partners has become far greater, as has eradicating the obstacles that get in the way of family engagement: language barriers, the digital divide, and the fact that some caregivers have been failed by inadequate schooling or suffer from learning challenges. How can we begin to prioritize the goal of making academic content and school resources more accessible? And how can we provide information in easy and comprehensible ways, so that any caregiver can support their young family members?

Despite all that we do to help families, despite trying to get children the digital resources they need, not all children are capable of learning online, especially since many of the online learning options do not take into account children who are hard of hearing, visually impaired, physically challenged, or have developmental delays. And some distance-learning resources are not translated into students' home languages, nor do they take into account scholars who aren't yet meeting grade-level requirements.

Therefore, as we embark on figuring out distance learning at scale, we must consider a variety of methods for engaging learners—calling students by phone, sending tutorial videos, and allowing students to demonstrate their understanding through varied methods. As we come up with remote-learning lessons, let's consider employing projects that rely on what families have at their disposal (resources and capabilities), and invite students to select topics that are not only relevant and interesting to them, but also tied to devising solutions to their current realities.

Another helpful idea is to create school projects that are relevant to the whole family and allow family members to do activities together (if safe and possible)—like making bread or using math to convert the portions for more or less people (for middle schoolers), or organizing a closet by color and texture (for younger students). Additionally, part of our support to families must include social and emotional resources for managing uncomfortable feelings, as well as giving families the brave space to feel and communicate their feelings—and ways to opt out of activities and assignments that cause too much strain on everyone in the home.

What will COVID-19 teach us? What will it inspire us to change? What will we have to improve to engage our students and families more meaningfully and equitably?

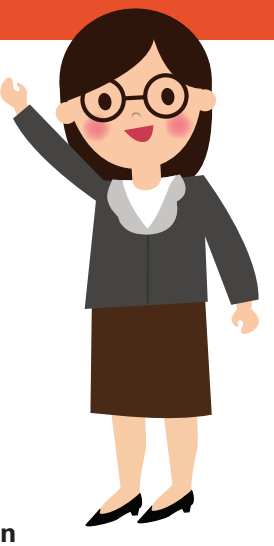
Learning from the Pauses

In the end, I do not have all the answers to the questions that this pandemic has forced educators to contemplate—but I know that there was a time before computers, tablets, and cell phones when teaching and learning happened, when we figured out how to lead a life. I know that we are capable of ingenuity, of adapting, and of healing. I know that we can learn from the pauses in our lives and use them as opportunities to reflect and reevaluate what's important to us. What will COVID-19 teach us? What will it inspire us to change? What will we have to improve to engage our students and families more meaningfully and equitably?

In the coming months, when we return to some level of normalcy, we will not be the same. We will be a bit shaken, maybe even a bit more paranoid about germs, but I hope we will have learned to be more deliberate about human connection, more purposeful about educating *all* children well, more aware of the power of human goodness, and more focused on partnering with families and organizations to educate all youth.

On some level, COVID-19 is our equity check, reminding us of who we could be if we valued equity as much as we say we do. Let's not wait until the next pandemic to get it right. If we do, the ones who will suffer will be the ones who always suffer—the people most in need. This novel virus is a wake-up call, an opportunity for us to come together to do and be better for every single child. EL

Dena Simmons (https://www.denasimmons.com) is a lifelong learner, educator, and activist who supports schools throughout the nation in implementing social and emotional learning and culturally responsive and equitable practices. She is the author of the forthcoming book, *White Rules for Black People* (St. Martin's Press, 2021). Follow her on Twitter @DenaSimmons.



Tell Us About. . .

Tell us about what your child's school or district is doing well during the pandemic crisis.

Routines Matter

A breath of fresh air . . . those are the words I use to describe my son's kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Robinson, in the midst of chaos. Our daily life and routine changed drastically in a matter of weeks, but Mrs. Robinson put amazing learning and connection into place. I'll never forget driving away from the first week of packet pick-up as tears fell down my son's face. Life was changing. A new normal was about to begin. That new normal, though, has been enlivened by Mrs. Robinson. Every day she meets virtually with my son to keep a routine that he loves so much—calendar time. It may seem trivial to many, but calendar time—with worship, dancing, show-and-share, and more—is so much to a 5-year-old! Not only does he get to see his teacher smiling, he gets to see his 12 best friends that he's spent the past 8 months with. The giggles and smiles are priceless!

—Robin Schuhmacher,
Peace with Christ Christian School, Aurora, Colorado

Great Communication

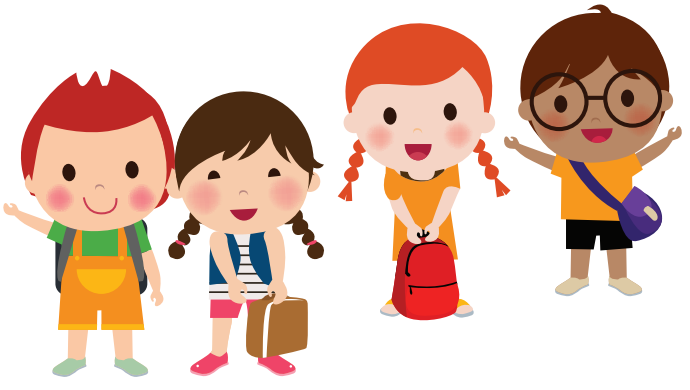
All of my children's teachers are reaching out daily and communicating with us even when they're unsure of how this will go. With constant changes from above related to both instructional platforms and teaching strategies, they're doing all they can to stay connected with their students and families—even as parents are angry and stressed and not always kind. Even as they struggle with teaching their own kids at home, with their own fears and worries. These teachers are giving us everything they have.

—Hannah Grieco, Arlington Pubic Schools, Arlington, VA

Celebrations Are Important

My daughter's 3rd grade teacher remembered to celebrate her birthday on the first day of remote learning! She then checked in with each student in the class individually to make sure they were doing OK. Amazing human!

—Eden King, West U Elementary, Houston, Texas



My son's 3rd grade teacher has been a rock star since day one of the pandemic crisis.

Virtual Preschool

There's been a burst of creativity and a speedy creation of an at-home remote learning model of our daughter's preschool. It's an inspiring mix of content, including weekly exploration ideas, daily videos with tutorials, teacher/kid video check-ins, morning circle time via Zoom, story time, and even the CLC Hootenanny. It's remarkable (and heartbreakingly sweet).

—Jeff Magness,
Children's Learning Center of Morningside Heights,
New York, New York

Normalcy in the Midst of Chaos

I am extraordinarily thankful for the teachers in Newport News Public Schools. They're not only dedicated to ensuring that learning continues, but they are also highly invested in the social and emotional wellness of the students. They are planning engaging lessons, despite the shutdown, where students can take virtual trips and learn more about the world, art, music, and more. Teachers are reaching out regularly to check on families and students, and to offer normalcy in the midst of chaos. From meals-to-go, packet pick-up stations, neighborhood car parades, and just plain love, the teachers in Newport News Public Schools are exceptional, and I couldn't ask for more as a parent. Thank you, teachers, for all you're doing, juggling, and managing for the wellness of our students. You are so very appreciated!

—Kelly McCoig,
Newport News Public Schools, Newport News, Virginia

Staying in Touch

My daughter's teacher, Mrs. Jaeger, has consistently stayed in touch through email, offering different types of resources to make sure that my daughter has what she needs to continue her education successfully. It has been helpful and nice for Mrs. Jaeger to still find ways to stay connected. My daughter loves school and misses being in class with her peers learning.

—Jasmine Wallace, Skyline Elementary
in Tacoma School District, Tacoma, Washington

Feeling Prepared and Engaged

The school, my child's teachers, and the whole staff is doing extremely well in these different and difficult circumstances. My daughter is fully engaged in her learning. She looks forward to completing her assignments, and that is mainly due to her teachers. Each teacher is providing assignments and instruction that are aimed at effective learning and fun engagement: FlipGrid videos, Zoom chats, creative lessons, interactive messages, and phone calls. It's a plan prepared in short time with great results so far. When school starts again in person, students and teachers will have acquired more teaching and learning skills and will have a stronger, more solid and engaged relationship.

—María Rossana Acuña-Nasralla,
Lawrencebrook Elementary School,
East Brunswick, New Jersey

Rockin' It

My son's 3rd grade teacher has been a rock star since day one of the pandemic crisis. She had the class organized to learn with fun and engaging ways to connect. She built such a strong classroom community during the year and has maintained this through distance learning. We are so lucky to have Mrs. Hughes as our son's teacher.

—Katie Madigan, Randolph Elementary,
Arlington, Virginia

Even as they struggle with teaching their own kids at home, with their own fears and worries, these teachers are giving us everything they have.

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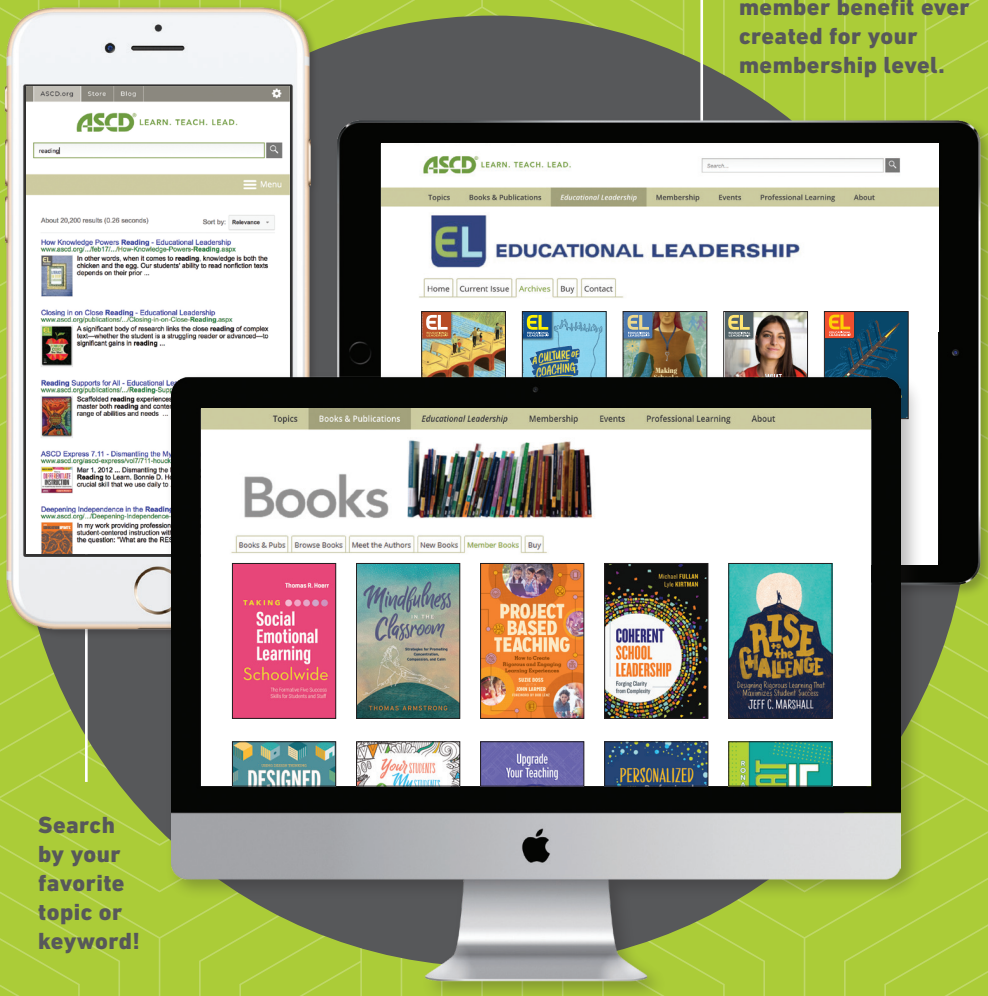

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