Overview

Communication is the heart of every interaction teachers and students have with each other. This is true whether communication happens face-to-face, online, or over the phone. Following are tips for educators to consider when planning for distance learning, especially during unexpected and stressful times.

Adjust to Distance Learning

Teachers worry about their students, their loved ones, and themselves simultaneously in unpredictable times. Many mourn the inability to have in-person closure with their students as well as in-person planning with their teams before schools closed and a shift to distance learning was called for.

The ability to create equitable and engaging learning experiences is both challenging and rewarding. To do this at a distance is something that is new for most teachers and students. New routines and procedures require explicit teaching, practice, and implementation to allow students to eventually devote as much brainpower toward the content as possible. This is especially true when learning is at a distance and the educator is not physically present to respond to students who feel uneasy or provide additional support as needed. Give yourself grace and honor the adjustment period needed for you and your students to transition to distance learning.

It is critical to keep the well-being of the students at the forefront of your mind when you find yourself lost in learning targets, deadlines, planning, and accountability. Now more than ever the communication between families and school personnel should focus on opportunities for distance learning to create a sense of normalcy more than holding students accountable for the completion of assignments.

In challenging times, many things weigh on the hearts and minds of educators, students, and families, including but not limited to:
- The need to work from home while managing the care of children
- The need to work as an essential or emergency worker, perhaps without assistance to support the child(ren)
- Care of siblings or sick relatives
- Meal management and/or food insecurity
- Balance the role of caregiver with the new/more intense role of "assistant to the school," often for multiple children
- Energy surplus of child(ren) who are at a distance from normal routines, activities and friends
- Anxiety about the unknown
- Adequate space for multiple family members to learn, work and stay safe
- Angst about making ends meet
- Home insecurity

Connect with Students Personally

In times of stress and anxiety, students most often miss the connection with their educator(s) more than the content that is taught. Some teachers will interact with their students through physical distribution of paper materials, some will use online platforms, and others will offer a combination of both.

Ask students and families how they are—reach out via phone, email, or any method that makes them comfortable. Keep conversations light, supportive, happy, and empathetic. Ask about their concerns. Remember students may feel comfortable sharing what they think other students their age might be concerned about but may not feel comfortable sharing their own concerns.

Connect with Students Professionally

When you interact with students online, you may have times where all students log-in at the same time (synchronous e-learning) or you may have opportunities for students to log-in at different times throughout the day (asynchronous e-learning). Online tools provide a wide variety of options as well an additional layer of learning for many teachers and students. In the following table most examples will be applicable to learning management platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, Blackboard, Schoology, Seesaw, etc.

Format	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Definition	Teachers and students log-in at the same time to interact with each other	Teachers and students log-in at different times to interact with each other
Examples	o Phone o Video chat o Instant message	o Pick-up/drop-off o Email o Discussion forum o Video lessons/demonstrations o Comment o Submit assignments o Feedback
Advantages	o Instantaneous responses (communication occurs in real-time) o Enhances community feel for group members who are online or on the call o Classroom feel/face-to-face discussion	o Flexible schedule for teacher and students o Wider variety of content delivery formats (written, video, etc) o Replay available for students, when pre-recorded video is used to deliver content o Concise and focused content video
Disadvantages	o Not all students may be available when teacher wants them to be, especially with shared devices o Community feel may be split when all members can't be present at same time o Difficult to replay content due as they are less concise	o Responses delayed o Connections fragmented o Required independence from students to navigate and stay organized
Recommendations	✦ Create "Office Hours" windows of time where students can expect the teacher to be available ✦ Avoid requiring specific times to be online; instead require a certain number of synchronous check-in(s) per day or week ✦ Work with students to make appointments to organize and ensure contact with all	✦ Create clear deadlines so students can plan schedules accordingly ✦ Provide frequent updates/reminders to keep students on track ✦ Explicitly teach students how to make a to-do list, create calendar reminders, etc. to allow for independent organization

Scaffold Process to Support Adjustment to New Structures

Create video lessons and documents, using pictures and videos, to teach procedures students will need to be successful at distance learning. Some ideas:

- o How to log into various platforms
- o How to turn in work
- o How to communicate with the teacher
- o How to communicate with peers

Remember to keep procedures separate from the content - the content is the skill itself.

New content should be introduced slowly. The more everyone feels successful from the start, the more confident they will be. This includes educators!