2020–21 Guidelines for Effective Distance Learning Practices

Many schools and systems have created plans for in-person, distance, and hybrid learning scenarios. Instruction Partners collaborated with educators, researchers, content-area specialists, and leading organizations to develop actionable strategies for maintaining high content and pedagogy expectations, as well as ensuring all students have access to high-quality instruction, in times of distance learning.

Resources in this document include:
- Building culture and community
- Presenting grade-level content
- Making learning visible
- Soliciting student responses, facilitating meaningful discussion, and encouraging collaboration
- Assessing student work and providing feedback

Building Culture and Community

Goal: Ensure all students feel safe and valued in the learning community; are comfortable expressing ideas and opinions; respect the opinions and ideas of peers; and are encouraged and inspired to seek understanding.

Strategy	In Action
Set clear expectations	**Establishing clear expectations** - Create, communicate, and maintain norms for virtual learning environments (e.g., cameras on, mute when not speaking, guidelines for participation). - Educate students about digital citizenship and safe use of technology. - Consult with families about expectations and seek understanding about the technical, technological, and adaptive supports that will help families prepare for learning. **Maintaining clear expectations** - Communicate to students and families your expectations for how students should spend their asynchronous learning time. Make expectations clear and concise, incorporate as many visuals and examples as possible, and share them in writing and verbally. For added clarity, give students and families a video recording of your expectations. - Make space for students who are having a hard time by sending them to a breakout room with another adult, to provide time for reset and reflection. - Share with families about student successes and challenges with the same regularity as in-person learning. - Seek understanding about incomplete assignments early and often. - Gather regular feedback from families about the distance learning experience, and incorporate that feedback into your cycles of improvement.

Cultivate a growth mindset culture	▪ Survey students to assess their level of comfort using virtual learning tools and platforms. Provide opportunities for students to learn more about specific features and "pro tips" for making the most of every virtual resource. ▪ Celebrate students for their efforts during synchronous and asynchronous work time (e.g., participating, asking and answering questions, completing tasks). ▪ Be open and honest about the challenges of remote and hybrid learning. ▪ Build in time for student goal-setting, reflection, and self-assessment. ▪ Respect variability in student and family schedules by allowing students to submit work outside of synchronous learning blocks. ▪ Teach students about the research behind growth mindset.
Emphasize team-building and social interaction	**Building relationships with students** ▪ Learn students' names; use them early and often. ▪ Plan teacher–student check-ins focused on student interests and wellbeing. ▪ Collaborate with support staff, therapists, and other education professionals to determine how to support students' social-emotional learning needs; designate time and resources accordingly. **Building community among students** ▪ Allocate time for students to engage in team-building activities and games. ▪ Consider opportunities and norms for safe, casual social interaction (e.g., unstructured time in breakout rooms, choice games, filters on Google Hangout). ▪ Create whole-class celebrations to recognize collective distance learning successes. ▪ Include opportunities for project-based learning during coursework and as supplemental community-building activities. ▪ Modify traditions that build community (e.g., class mascots, classroom jobs) for a virtual environment. ▪ Establish grade level–appropriate morning meetings and/or community circles.
Motivate and celebrate students	▪ Incorporate into lessons and modules real-life examples that are culturally and socially relevant to your students. ▪ Create virtual bulletin boards to highlight student work and interests. ▪ Incorporate enrichment opportunities and and co-curricular activities into the virtual schedule. ▪ Celebrate all forms of student success. ▪ Modify celebratory traditions (e.g., virtual field trips, academic clubs) for a virtual environment. ▪ Schedule special events (e.g., theme days) during synchronous learning time.

Presenting Grade-level Content

Goal: Ensure all students can access grade-level materials; are clear on objectives, outcomes, and expectations for learning; can easily communicate with teachers and peers; learn simple, consistent routines for participating in live or recorded sessions; and complete associated learning tasks.

Strategy	In Action
Make instructional materials accessible	**Enabling access** ▪ Deliver students and families with printed materials and (when possible) devices for synchronous learning. ▪ Publish a daily and weekly schedule for families, organizing the work by asynchronous vs. synchronous learning time; include expectations, deadlines; and a list of materials students will need for class. ▪ Norm on organizational structures across grade levels and content areas so that families can access materials in a consistent way. **Leveraging best practices** ▪ Offer multiple opportunities and modalities for students and families to communicate with teachers (e.g., newsletters, office hours, conference calls). ▪ Display a learning agenda and objectives at the beginning of synchronous time so students can anticipate activities, breaks, and opportunities for collaboration. ▪ List objectives on asynchronous learning materials. ▪ Create your plan for how students will demonstrate understanding. ▪ Provide students with exemplars to reference for preview and review (e.g., exemplar completion of tasks with multiple representations and annotations).
Record lessons	**Accessing recorded lessons** ▪ Train students how to use digital tools in virtual classrooms; record short instructional videos with step-by-step instructions, screen recordings, and opportunities for practice. ▪ Build a hub, landing page, or similar system for organizing lessons (e.g., Google Classroom's "Classwork" tab). ▪ Use multiple means of communication to share recorded resources with students and families. **Using recorded lessons** ▪ Supplement core lessons with videos. ▪ Embed short videos in Google Forms so that students can watch clips and respond to them. ▪ Record the feedback you share with students; consider feedback that references specific trends in student work.

	▪ Use curriculum-based instructional videos (e.g., Eureka, Wit and Wisdom "In Sync"). ▪ Assign pre-work as asynchronous learning with video resources (e.g., Khan Academy). ▪ Record synchronous lessons for students who need to view outside synchronous learning time. **Using student recordings** ▪ Support students using screen and voice recordings to asynchronously capture and share their thinking (e.g., SeeSaw). **Leveraging best practices** ▪ Include pause points in videos for students to think, respond, or work independently.
Accommodate small-group instruction	**Planning for small-group instruction** ▪ Prioritize grade-level instruction and standards. ▪ Use data from previous assignments to plan small-group instruction. ▪ Publish a small-group instruction schedule. **Leading small-group instruction** ▪ Keep groups flexible. ▪ Use private or small-group chats and breakout rooms to scaffold whole-group instruction; provide appropriate accommodations so all students can access content (e.g., read-alouds, large-print resources, digital calculators). ▪ Facilitate small-group phone calls when other digital platforms are not an option. ▪ Check for understanding frequently; offer multiple opportunities for students to ask and respond to questions.

Making Learning Visible

Goal: Ensure all students can see and interact with all instructional materials; have clear examples of key learnings or task expectations; and experience teachers modeling behaviors and practices.

Strategy	In Action
Provide visual anchors	**Accessing visual anchors** ▪ Assemble packets or cards with anchor charts and send them home in weekly family communications. ▪ Create an interactive notebook where students organize and practice with concepts from visual anchors. ▪ Load the anchor charts into your class website and link into student work documents. ▪ Create a card ring with visual anchors; organize them so students can flip to the appropriate anchor for the lesson (e.g., number or color-code cards for students to find). **Using visual anchors** ▪ Intersperse anchor charts into slide decks; match the visuals students encounter in synchronous learning environments to the resources they use during independent work. ▪ Reference visual anchors during synchronous instruction; practice placing and using at-home anchor charts.
Leverage manipulatives and other learning materials	**Accessing manipulatives** ▪ Identify a focused number of manipulatives, materials, and routines. ▪ Send home materials and manipulatives; when appropriate, provide families a list of common objects that can be used as manipulatives (e.g., pennies as counters) and how to practice during asynchronous learning. ▪ Provide families a description of manipulatives, their purpose, and how to use the tools; record mini-instructional videos showing replicable routines and practice with specific manipulatives. ▪ Set expectations for student and family lesson preparation, including what materials they will need, to avoid loss of instructional time; communicate to families which manipulatives will be prioritized for the coming week's lessons so they can organize the synchronous learning materials. ▪ Model how to use materials during synchronous learning time or via instructional videos; include think-alouds about how students might use the manipulatives during asynchronous learning.

Using manipulatives
- Establish routines for practice with manipulatives throughout a module or unit.
- Display concrete manipulatives in a digital format (e.g., letter tiles, base ten blocks, rekenreks, Didax resources) during synchronous learning time.
- Match digital manipulatives, paper-based visuals, and concrete manipulatives so that students build connections across synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.

Soliciting Student Responses and Facilitating Meaningful Discussion and Student Collaboration

Goal: Ensure all students have regular opportunities to actively respond to questions and task work; contribute to class discussions surrounding grade-level content; and communicate with their teacher about instructional content and the distance learning experience.

Strategy	In Action
Share student thinking	**Preparing students to share thinking** ▪ Set clear norms for how and when to respond (e.g., via chat). ▪ Collect student work ahead of synchronous learning time and incorporate it into subsequent lesson presentations (e.g., sequence student math representations for error analysis and discussion, share a student-composed example of an introduction to an argumentative essay). ▪ Assign strategic partnerships (e.g., Kagan-style partnerships, collaborations based on previous work). **Sharing student thinking** ▪ Provide individual student recording sheets for students to track thinking and for teachers to provide feedback (e.g., stop and jot). ▪ Check for task completion and understanding by asking students to hold up work to their screen during synchronous time (e.g., worksheets, task pages); consider using whiteboards as a way for students to complete and share work. ▪ Use digital whiteboards and screen-sharing technology. ▪ Have students take photos of written work and share via AirDrop. ▪ Provide structured small-group discussion time with a clear output and academic accountability (e.g., small group breakout rooms with roles assigned and a required written response); build routines for small groups to present to the entire learning community. ▪ Ask students to collaborate using a common written space (e.g., shared Google doc). ▪ Conduct a poll for specific strategies to identify trends; call on students to share their thinking.

Facilitate whole-group engagement	**Preparing whole-group lessons** ▪ Model how to take notes during synchronous learning time. ▪ Determine a protocol for students asking questions (e.g., raising your hand during Zoom sessions). **Engaging the whole group** ▪ Conduct frequent checks for understanding. ▪ Provide wait time so students have the opportunity to think. ▪ Poll students for quick responses. ▪ Gauge consensus using fist-to-five or other hand gestures. ▪ Use call and response, cold calling, and warm calling. ▪ Incorporate emojis (e.g., Zoom reactions). ▪ Incorporate verbal celebrations (e.g., shoutouts, all calls).
Create collaborative partnerships and groups	▪ Prioritize instructionally vulnerable students for supplementary teacher-facilitated small-group time. ▪ Use breakout rooms. ▪ Enable chat boards during asynchronous learning time. ▪ Support interdependent learning using rubrics and peer evaluation tools. ▪ Provide sentence starters for debates, discussions, and turn-and-talks to support student thinking.

Assessing Student Work and Providing Feedback

Goal: Ensure all students have teacher support as they engage in grade-level work and receive feedback that will move the learning forward. Ensure all teachers use the oral and written data collected from student work to drive instruction, both in the moment and in future lessons.

Strategy	In Action
Monitor student work	**Supporting on-task behavior** ▪ Deli Monitor for on-task behavior (e.g., have students hold up their work to the screen to show assignment completion). ▪ Circulate in breakout rooms. ▪ Build in opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of directions (e.g., showing they have the materials they need and are on the correct page). **Supporting quality work** ▪ Ensure students receive feedback on their thinking, not just on compliance. ▪ Circulate in breakout rooms. ▪ Follow responses in collaborative and independent documents; contribute synchronously and asynchronously. ▪ Use running records to collect anecdotal evidence of learning.
Deliver meaningful feedback	**Setting expectations** ▪ Establish clear and fair grading policies (including modifications); report at regular intervals. ▪ Build protocols for submitting work and getting feedback, including communicating with families and opportunities for revision. ▪ Ask students to take pictures of work and submit them digitally. **Providing feedback for students and families** ▪ Incorporate feedback on academics, scholarly habits, and use of virtual learning tools. ▪ Leverage the comment features within digital platforms to respond to student work. ▪ Meet with individual students or groups of students to provide synchronous feedback. ▪ Use rubrics and other self-assessment tools. ▪ Use error analysis and batch feedback strategies to address trends in student learning pathways. ▪ Schedule office hours for students to seek feedback and additional support.

About Instruction Partners

Instruction Partners works alongside educators to support great teaching, accelerate student learning, name and address unconscious bias, and ensure equitable access to great instruction—particularly for students in poverty, students of color, students learning English, and students with disabilities.