

## **Considerations for Distance Learning**

The purpose of this brief is to provide guidance for educators regarding use of evidence-based practices, centering equity, and establishing connections with students and families when planning and providing distance learning.

### **Description and Rationale**

Distance learning is a set of alternative modes of instruction to the traditional classroom where in-person instruction occurs. For purposes of this brief, distance learning will be defined as methods of teaching and learning other than instructional packets or online instruction in which students are together live with an instructor in a virtual classroom. Distance learning may include use of phones, email, videos, slideshows, project-based learning, computer programs or applications, or a hybrid of methods. An important guiding principle for distance learning is all teaching and learning must be guided by flexibility, reasonable expectations, connections with students and families, and collaboration among educators (MDE, 2020).

### **Instructional Planning & Delivery**

#### **Giving Directions**

Consider all of the information students and families will need to know to complete the activity they are requested to do. This includes what they will need to do (1) prior, (2) during, and (3) after completion. Directions should be clear and concise, including accessible, user-friendly, non-technical language.

- When possible, provide directions in multiple formats, including written and oral / video, breaking down directions into chunks if necessary (i.e., Step 1, Step 2).
- Detail the amount of time and materials needed to engage in the activity.
- Share examples and non-examples of appropriate use.
- Use asset-based language that highlights student strengths in ways that promote physical, cultural, intellectual, social & emotional safety inclusion.

#### **Design of Instruction**

Instructional design that structures lessons and assignments into smaller units and offers students flexibility and choices facilitates student engagement and accessibility.

- Consider options for how students access instruction (e.g., independent reading of text, links to web-videos, links to teacher-created instructional videos, graphics, audio clips, interactive applications).
- Consider options for demonstration of learning (e.g., completion of Google forms, creation of a video, turning in written assignments, making connections to real world application, worksheets).

- Record short videos to model and “think aloud” the skill being taught, allowing students to watch and re-watch as often as needed. Including teacher modeling and worked examples into the design of instruction are research-based examples of effective cognitive support (Rosenshine, 2012).
- Design periodic partner work over email, phone, online forums, or blogs to provide students with opportunities for connection and collaboration with each other.

### **Delivery of Instruction**

The majority of learning should focus on the content being delivered, not the system used to deliver it. It is essential to set clear expectations and define learning objectives upfront. Keep in mind that students will access content at different times and places in this context.

- Create a predictable learning environment to support students and families in their educational planning.
- Include pacing or time-on-task recommendations.
- Use resources students are familiar with and are readily available (i.e. do not require subscriptions).
- Test all resources / instructional materials before sharing with students and families.
- Provide strategies to support students in how to work through the content since teacher guidance may not be readily available.
- Provide parents with answer sheets as a means to give feedback and suggestions to teachers, as well as students.
- Use of daily progress templates may assist in giving and getting feedback.

### **Connecting with Students**

Distance learning should include connections with students as frequently as possible, including checking in just to see how students are doing. Allowing space for regular conversations and laughter between teachers and students can be incredibly important. Continue to build on relationships that have been built with students this year.

- Provide clear, consistent, accessible ways for communicating with students and families, including structures for outgoing communication, incoming communication, and two-way communication, so that students and families can predict where and how communication will occur.
- Consider a variety of communication tools (i.e., social media, email, videos from teachers, short recorded video check-ins, screencasts, FlipGrid, Loom, phone calls, texts, video conferencing, discussion boards, voice mail, Google Forms, written communication via postal service).

### **Connecting with Families**

When online direct instruction is not available, creative solutions are needed to engage students and families in the work. Let parents know there is no expectation that they instruct their children. Instead, encourage parents to motivate and monitor their students' learning. Teachers should respectfully and effectively communicate with families while considering background, socioeconomic status, language, and culture of the family. At this point, the relationship

between the parent and teacher needs to be developed or strengthened to include the parent as a partner in their child's learning during this unique time.

- Provide parents with an email or phone call to promote a successful distance learning experience for families. Deliver initial contact by the mail, email, phone or parent portal of the district website. Include explicit instructions for how the parent can engage in their students' learning, while highlighting student's strengths, progress, and the need for parent's feedback and engagement. Assess and respect parents' ability/willingness to provide academic support.
- Use the established communication method to answer parents' questions or concerns and for making any adaptation due to their family situation. Develop a template for parents to use to ask questions or report concerns.
- Consider options to protect privacy when calling families. Teachers can use \*67 before dialing the phone number or set up a Google Voice account, which allows calling, texting, or messaging of another phone without sharing personal numbers. Notify families of usage of this protection as people tend to block calls that have numbers hidden.

## Additional Resources

[MiMTSS TA Center Covid-19 Resources for Educators and Teams](https://miblsi.org/covid-19-resources) provides briefs on Online Instruction and Instructional Packets (<https://miblsi.org/covid-19-resources>)

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