Assessment in a Remote Learning Environment: Recommended Practices

Purpose

This communication provides an overview of best practices in assessment -- culled from research of national and state guidelines -- to support educators in the provision of continuity of learning.

Instruction and assessment practices must adapt when teaching and learning in a remote education environment. Remote learning does not just take place online, so consideration must be given to both analog and virtual assessment practices for all students.

The following recommendations and best practices are organized under four design pillars of Continuity of Learning in Vermont: Communication, Structures for Student Success, Instruction and Feedback, and Ensuring Accessibility. Resources related to the design pillars are provided within each section.

Communication

- Develop communication expectations for students to interact with the teacher and with each other to foster group cohesiveness and support student learning growth, including group activities and assessments.
- Establish an *Academic Integrity Policy* for the SU/SD. As an example, see the Academic Integrity Matrix from VTVLC in the resource section below.
- Communicate the assessment plan including purpose, frequency, expectations, and communication structure to the necessary stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians, students, staff, teachers, etc.).
- Communicate how student assessment information will be shared with students and guardians/families in the remote learning environment.
- Maintain open communication with students, including receiving and responding to their feedback.

Resources

- [Remote Learning Recommendations,](#) Illinois State Board of Education
- [Kansas Continuous Learning Plan 2020](#)
- [Assessment: The Bridge between Teaching and Learning.](#)

Contact Information:

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- VTVLC, Canvas: [Integrity Chart and Description, policy and guidelines](#)
- [Gaytan and McEwen](#)
- [eLearning Day Best Practice Considerations and Checklist](#), Indiana Department of Education
- [Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems in School District Systems: ACT 173 Technical Guidance](#), Vermont Agency of Education
- [Resources for Adult Education](#)

Structures for Student Success

- Establish the broader organizational purposes of assessment during school closure:
  - *Instructional Purpose* – using the data from assessments to make ongoing instructional decisions at the student level;
  - *Administrative Purpose* – using the data from assessments to evaluate remote learning programs and program inputs such as curriculum and professional development; and
  - *Policy Purpose* – using data at the school board governance level to set organizational goals for all students in a remote learning environment to address issues of quality and equity, and to evaluate implementation of your districts' CLP.
- Determine how student assessment data will be used (e.g., to support and advance student learning and success; for continuous improvement and personalizing student learning; for informing, engaging, and empowering students, families, teachers, and school system leaders, etc.)
- Establish criteria to determine student readiness to demonstrate learning remotely - both offline and online.
- Develop and provide effective rubrics that will support the assessment activities in advance.
- Reflect, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment practices and strategies, then revise accordingly.
- Provide training opportunities for teachers, parents/guardians, and students around ensuring student data privacy in a remote learning environment.
- Prepare and provide basic training for teachers who have never used an online environment to teach before. This should include understanding how to conduct classes in a virtual environment; knowing when and how to use video conferencing, share content, and respond to students' submissions; online classroom management; and more.
- Determine how and when classroom content should be assessed. Consider the amount of student commitment time involved to perform and complete the assessment for any delivery model (e.g., learning packets, online, blended, etc.) using the following recommended guidelines: Pre-K: 30 minutes; K-1: 45 minutes; Grades 2-3: 60 minutes; Grades 4-5: 90 minutes; Grades 6-12: 30 minutes per teacher for a maximum of three hours per day.

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(Revised: April 7, 2020)

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- Consider the time and space required for students to provide evidence of learning (e.g., recording read-alouds, conducting science experiments, learning reflections).
- Provide flexibility for learning schedules so teachers and students can manage household demands (e.g., online capacity, computer sharing, leaning spaces, etc.).
- Determine how individualized feedback and support will be provided and with what frequency (e.g., office hours, 1:1 conferences, etc.).
- Provide a space (both virtual or analog) where students reflect on their learning and the teacher responds with acknowledgement of learning, constructive feedback, and questions to extend their thinking.
- Determine and establish timeframes for teachers and students to provide and receive meaningful and timely feedback. This should be no less than on a weekly basis.

Resources

- [Teacher Guide to Online Learning](#)
- [Gaytan and McEwen](#)
- [Seven Keys to Effective Feedback](#)
- [Recommendations for Long-Term Remote Learning](#)
- [Screen Time and the Brain](#)
- [Screen time and children](#)
- [VTVLC's COVID-19 Page](#)

Instruction and Feedback

- When assessing student work, it is important to note the priority is to assess in a manner that supports motivation and participation in remote learning. The assessments or grading should not be punitive in any manner.
- Make sure all feedback affirms growth and acknowledges difficult circumstances.
- Ask students what format and type of feedback is helpful to them.
- Identify and review the assessments that are currently in place as a first step toward the development of a coherent, balanced assessment system. Emphasize performance assessments that encourage inquiry, are multidisciplinary in nature, tap into student interests and home circumstances.

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- Utilize a variety of student work to assess student learning; assess in the aggregate to ensure a complete picture of student learning (e.g., review students' writing in chat rooms, e-mail messages, and on discussion boards).
- Provide a variety of assessment techniques (e.g., performance assessments, quizzes, self-tests, peer assessments, weekly review questions, self-reflections) that acknowledges the current learning environment and schedules of your students (i.e., family illness, disrupted schedules, slow or no internet).
- Place student reflection and self-assessment at the center of feedback.
- For example, students (with families) take the time to organize and design their learning portfolio (digital and/or paper)
- Students have a personal journal/learning log/interactive learning log with dated entries to document their learning, impressions, and feelings about the experience of learning under these new conditions
- Use assessment practices that promote engagement and let students know that they are heard.
- Offer feedback on student work during the drafting process and that is connected to task learning objectives.
- Use common benchmark assessments in required content areas to collect accurate student data to measure student learning growth for advancement.
- Design developmentally appropriate performance-based assessments to support problem-solving, deep thinking, and personalization.
- Utilize assessments in order to understand a student's progression toward critical proficiencies identified by the school/district.

Resources

- [Seven Keys to Effective Feedback](#)
- [Gaytan and McEwen](#)
- [Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems in School District Systems: ACT 173 Technical Guidance](#), Vermont Agency of Education
- [Remote Learning Recommendations During COVID-19 Emergency](#)
- [Dynamic Learning Maps At-Home Learning Resources](#)
- [Quality Criteria for Performance Assessments](#)
- [Performance Assessment Tools and Resources](#)
- [COVID-19: Teachers, Families, and the Future](#)
- [A New Normal: Assessment & Distance Learning](#)
- [10 Principles of Competency Based Learning](#) – assessment principles
- [Online Learning Habits](#)

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Ensuring Accessibility

- Commit to meeting students where they are, moving them along a continuum of learning, and providing timely supports when needed.
- Before assessments are posted, carefully check for clarity and readability, ensuring that students have the details they need to properly interpret them (e.g. instructions, assessment criteria, access to materials, etc.).
- Consider the needs of multilingual, special education, and other students requiring additional supports and the accommodations, modifications, and alternative assessment strategies that might best measure student learning growth.
- Educators should work with special educator colleagues to identify technological needs and supports for their students. Determine what online accessibility features previously used in the classroom can be available in the home environment.
- Provide opportunities for multilingual learners to utilize their home language whenever possible. Invite students to draft/complete work in languages other than English. This may be accompanied by a summary or reflection in English, so the teacher can access and give feedback.

Resources

- [Lexile and Quantile Frameworks](#)
- [COVID-19 Response: Preparing to Take School Online](#)
- [Remote Education Resources for Special Education](#)
- [Understanding Language Free Online Courses for Educators of ELs](#)
- [Dynamic Learning Maps At-Home Learning Resources](#)
- [Join Virtual Lessons for At-Home Education](#)
- [Differentiation in online learning](#)
- [Remote Learning Recommendations,](#) Illinois State Board of Education
- [Vermont Agency of Education COVID-19 Special Education Guidance](#)

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