Instruction in a Remote Learning Environment:
Universal Principles and Recommended Practices

Revised Dec. 15, 2020

UPDATED ## Purpose

In accordance with [Strong and Healthy Start Guidance](#), Vermont schools **should plan for a certain amount of flexibility to pivot their school instruction along a continuum of options from full in-person instruction to full remote learning.** In an effort to support supervisory unions and districts (SU/SDs) with the implementation of **their pivot-ready learning plans,** the Agency of Education (AOE) offers the following **updated** principles and recommended practices for instruction in remote learning environments. These principles and practices are intended to help educators reflect on and meet the challenges they will face as they **prepare for sudden school closures and re-engage in** remote instruction. **Remote learning is still a necessary part of education for students not attending in-person instruction, and for those students engaging in hybrid or blended learning environments.** The AOE will continue to **update and** publish documents to further address topics listed in this guidance.

Universal Principles of Instruction for Remote Learning

UPDATED ### Keep Students at the Center
Maintain relationships and connections through intentional outreach. Help students feel safe and valued. At minimum, plan to do the following:

- Plan for Student Learning: Build on each student's strengths, interests and needs and use this knowledge to personalize instruction and positively impact learning. **Utilizing personalized learning plans can be an effective mechanism to encourage student input, offer feedback, track progress and document growth.**
- Develop a Weekly Plan and Schedule: Offer routines and structures for consistency, while at the same time providing the flexibility to balance think time, work time and play time for health and well-being.
- Contact Families and Caregivers: Partner to support student learning through ongoing communication and collaboration. *Supporting families and caregivers supports your students.* It will not look the same for every student and family—safety remains the priority. Provide translations as necessary.

Design Learning for Equity and Access
Plan and deliver content in multiple ways so all students can access learning.

Contact Information:

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- Instructional Content: Set goals using knowledge of each student and of each school's identified critical proficiencies **and PBGRs** that are aligned to Vermont's state adopted standards and transferable skills.
- Deliver Flexible, **Personalized** Instruction: Consider how to deliver content **during sudden school closures for the learning model, technological** tools and **available** resources accessible to each student. Delivery of instruction may include printed learning materials, phone contact, email, technology-based virtual instruction, or a combination **of strategies to** meet diverse student needs.
- Engage Families and Caregivers: Communicate with families and caregivers about engagement strategies to support students as they access the learning. Families are critical partners. Provide translations as necessary.

UPDATED Assess Student Learning

Manage and monitor student learning and plan what's next for learning.

- Check Student Learning: Use a variety of strategies to monitor, assess and provide feedback to students about their learning.
- Make Instructional Adjustments: Use formative assessment results to guide student reflection on effectiveness of instruction and to determine next steps for student learning.
- **Local Summative Assessments Must Be Flexible: Characteristics of differing learning models will require summative assessments to change context or task. Consider modifying summative tasks to be project and/or performance based to ensure students are successful whether they have been participating in synchronous or asynchronous learning environments.**
- **Plan for Grading and for Certifying Achievement: Pivot plans** should take into consideration the uneven/inequitable conditions in which students will be accessing their educational experiences – including inequitable access to supervision, technology, materials, quiet study space, adult support and other basic needs.
- Engage Families and Caregivers: Communicate with and seek input from families and caregivers about assessment results in order to inform next steps. Provide translations as necessary.

For additional information see Assessment in a Remote Learning Environment: Recommended Practices.

Recommended Practices for Remote Learning

UPDATED Lesson Planning

Disruptions due to **sudden** school closures can impact student availability and their schedules. When planning remote lessons, teachers need to take a less-is-more approach. **It is essential to**

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identify critical proficiencies and transferable skills **in order to provide continuity of learning and** flexibility for student pacing. **A district/school-wide approach to determining critical proficiencies ensures consistency across schools, grade levels and content areas, and continues to move students forward in their learning.**

When designing a pivot-ready plan, consider whether a student **regularly** needs to meet synchronously with a teacher for a scheduled check-in or virtual lecture, or whether learning can occur over a given time frame from previously prepared lessons and resources **with intermittent synchronous check-ins/instruction.** An asynchronous approach to remote learning allows students to progress at their own pace and helps shift teachers from distributors of knowledge to designers of experiences and facilitators of learning. **It also creates more space within school schedules for educators to offer additional supports to students who may be struggling.**

Daily academic schedules should include age-appropriate engagement expectations for students, including considerations regarding screen time (See: [Continuity of Learning: Digital Literacy and Screen Time](#)). Academic expectations can be comprised of live daily contact between teachers and students (and/or caregiver); direct instruction (either synchronously or asynchronously); independent student work (individual or group); opportunity for questions and feedback during teacher office hours.

UPDATED   ### Recommended Guidelines

- Provide learning opportunities that balance structured, synchronous learning experiences with flexible, asynchronous learning experiences.
- **Consider leveraging low bandwidth options like WhatsApp and Google Forms, and minimize usage of high bandwidth/data attachments or videos when possible to ensure all students can access content and instruction.**
- When planning an online lesson, consider the student audience and the balance of media students will encounter (documents, audio, slides, video, websites, discussion boards, pictures, live chats); minimize heavy reliance on one media over others.
- Prepare your learning and teaching space by minimizing the distractions around you while you work. Consider your backdrop, camera angle and lighting.
- Recognize that teaching face-to-face allows for a certain amount of improv, including spur-of-the-moment changes to lessons. Online teaching requires more up-front work, particularly when designing course materials.
- Plan for "unplugged" learning to promote healthy technology usage for all students.
- Continue or consider planning lessons in conjunction with paraprofessionals, multilingual staff, special educators or other related service providers.

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- **Use student support plans - EST, 504 and IEP - to ensure differentiation, implementation and equitable access for special populations. Services and accommodations must be adapted for a remote learning environment.**
- Recognize that while routine and normalcy are important in students' lives, this may be the moment to further teaching practice by taking risks in designing new interdisciplinary learning experiences for students.
- Create or select learning opportunities connected to students' current reality.
- Take advantage of [project-based learning](#) to integrate content in meaningful ways.
- Incorporate freely available resources like PBS programming and activities into the day.
- Incorporate opportunities for students to use transferable skills, especially communication, self-direction and problem solving.
- Invite families and caregivers into the learning space and activities.
- Encourage students to use a variety of strategies to demonstrate what they have learned.

Personalized Learning

Remote learning lends itself to providing opportunities for students to interact authentically with what they learn. Creating a space for students to control how their education continues encourages them to be active learners in an analog or virtual space, rather than passive consumers of content. In addition, allowing students to give feedback on lessons can build trust and relationships in a remote learning environment and actively build a supportive community.

Recommended Guidelines

- Elicit feedback from students to improve and reflect upon online teaching practices/styles, as well as lessons and assessments.
- Provide a variety of different resources or entry points to meet students' readiness levels and learning styles.
- Encourage students to problem solve with resources they may have access to.
- Leverage choice boards, interactive learning menus or parallel units that align to critical proficiencies and transferable skills.
- Engage students in the lesson planning process by giving them opportunities to drive topics that interest them.
- Create opportunities for students to engage in content and transferable skills using current events.

Communication

Teachers should have a consistent, concise and accessible communication plan that prioritizes responsive and timely feedback. Student connections with their teacher make learners feel supported and connected, which is critical to their mental and emotional well-

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being. Responsive and timely feedback can help alleviate tension and stress when learners are working in a remote environment.

UPDATED ## Recommended Guidelines

- Ensure all students have access to information through at least one form of communication (mail, phone calls, videos, email, WhatsApp, Google Forms, etc.).
- Leverage the SU/SD's mass communication resources to text students and families with links to content that are accessible by cellphone, when possible.
- Cleary define terms and/or **intent** to avoid miscommunication.
- **Work** with students, families and caregivers on **their preferred mode and frequency of communication to** maintain relationships.
- Establish norms for synchronous check in calls/video chats or educator office hours.
- Assign note-takers and chat moderators to build community with student groups during synchronous check in calls/video chats.
- Remind students how to best communicate with their teacher and, when appropriate, peers.
- Communicate clear expectations for assigned work.
- Develop guidelines for teacher response times and include all relevant staff members, especially paraprofessionals, multilingual staff, special educators and any other related service providers.
- Establish and follow any district guidelines and communication plans when needing to report on student well-being or student crisis.
- Identify a process for making materials, including library books, available to families.
- Send home information that includes content represented through multiple modes (e.g., text, diagram, graphic organizers and illustrations).
- Provide families and caregivers with sample schedules that are balanced between independent work and work supported by adults.

UPDATED # Reflective Planning

SU/SDs should consider successes and failures from the 2020 spring school closure period when designing their pivot-ready plans. These considerations will provide a springboard to implement necessary changes to remote learning models in the event of sudden school closures. While the transition from **one mode of learning to another** will **still be disruptive to student learning, a pivot-ready plan that has incorporated learned lessons from the spring will help an SU/SD** adjust their practices to meet the needs of their students. Teachers, students and families collaborating together to design and implement systems of learning that will sustain students **throughout the remainder of the school year** and provide new opportunities for students to learn in authentic, meaningful ways.

Resources for Remote Learning

As the demand for both internet access and available data has increased rapidly, many providers have responded with special offers. The offerings vary from free internet to unlimited data. Check with your local provider for offerings, or [The Federal Communications Commission,](#) which has a list of companies and organizations that have signed the Keep Americans Connected Pledge.   For Vermont-specific information, please visit the Department of Public Service website for information on [new connectivity services](#).

Remote Learning Resources

- [AOE - Continuity of Learning: Technology Considerations for Remote Learning](#)
- [AOE- Supplemental Virtual Learning Resources](#)
- [AOE - Continuity of Learning: Digital Literacy and Screen Time](#)
- [AOE - Continuity of Learning: Virtual Road Map for Pivot-Ready Plans](#)
- [AOE - Guide to Administering the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments Remotely](#)
- [Smarter Balanced: Remote Learning and Formative Assessment Process](#)
- [Enabling Distance Learning using Hangouts Meet](#) from Google for Education
- [Tips for Enabling Distance Learning through G Suite & Chrome](#)
- [Maine Curriculum Leaders Association (MCLA) Remote Learning Resources for PK-2](#)
- [MCLA Remote Learning Resources for Upper Elementary Grades](#)
- [COVID-19 Featured Resources from VTVLC](#)
- [COVID-19: Featured Resources from NEASC](#)
- [14 Tips for Helping Students with Limited Internet Have Distance Learning](#)
- [Distance Learning: 6 UDL Best Practices for Online Learning](#)

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