

Maintenance of Learning: Guidelines for Educators

The “New Normal”

As Vermont schools assist in the state’s overall response efforts, our collective goal is to keep students, families, and educators safe as we work to slow the spread of COVID-19. This also means that schools will play new roles in the provision of essential services and have new delivery systems of education.

According to [recent Agency of Education guidance](#):

- During this period of school closure (March 18 to April 6, 2020) ordered by the Governor, students are not to report to school and school employees are directed to report to work. Staff members may be required to report to work or to work remotely, depending on the needs of the district and the guidance of public health officials. **During this closure period, regular educational services do not continue, and students are not expected to make academic progress.** Other services, such as child care for essential public safety and healthcare workers, will be supported by the district’s staff.
- If it becomes necessary to extend this closure period beyond April 6, districts may also be asked to provide more formal educational services to students. All educational services, to the extent possible, would then be offered to all students through various remote and virtual means.

Under the Governor’s directive, schools will remain operational for administrators, teachers and staff to sustain essential services and to plan and implement continuity of learning. [The Vermont Department of Health](#) has provided “social distancing” guidance that educators should use to ensure a healthy workplace.

Establishing Communication and Developing New Routines:

Emotional Safety and Communication

Organizations around the country are working to provide support for educators and students in a variety of ways. The [National Association of School Psychologists](#) (NASP) provides the following suggestions below regarding how parents/guardians can respond to children’s fears regarding COVID-19.

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. While we don’t know where and to what extent the disease may spread here in the United States, we do know that it is contagious, that the severity of illness can vary from individual to individual, and that there are steps we can take to prevent the spread of infection. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm.

Contact Information:

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It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents/guardians seem overly worried, children’s anxiety may rise. Parents/guardians should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

The NASP further advises everyone to maintain a normal routine to the fullest extent possible. Educators should encourage families to develop a regular schedule that creates a “new normal” and provides a level of predictability for children and adults.

What advice can you give to parents?

The following guidelines can be used to guide parents/guardians in setting up the home learning environment:

- **Create a Learning Space:** When possible, the home environment should be arranged to provide students with a quiet space dedicated to learning that has minimal distractions (e.g., TV, cell phones, noise). If there is more than one student home, have children in different rooms if possible. The learning space for young children should be in the view of a supervising adult.
- **Develop a Schedule:** While at home, parents/guardians should develop a daily routine for maintaining learning. The daily routine should have planned time for educational activities (e.g., reading books, playing math games, etc.), exercise, arts, and socialization. Outdoor activities are encouraged whenever possible! This should be an opportunity to enjoy being with your child/children.
- **Identify Times to Stay Connected:** Isolation is a new concept for families and students. Teachers should communicate with their students and families on a regular basis to break down the barriers of isolation and keep track of how their students are doing. Maintaining strong student relationships and parent partnerships is key to learning at home. Parents need guidance and resources to partner well with teachers.

Assessing for Access: An Equity Lens

According to the Vermont Agency of Education, [educational equity](#) means that every student has “access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender/identity, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income.” Educational Equity is the degree of achievement, fairness and opportunity in education as measured by a standard of success.

Since systems cannot ensure equitable access for all Vermont students at this time, the current goal is to focus on maintenance of education during this initial school closing period. If schools are dismissed for an extended period of time, a continuing education plan will need to be enacted. The Agency of

Education, in collaboration with other organizations, is working to develop regional strategies for meeting the varying needs of children in kindergarten through fifth grade and sixth through twelfth grade and beyond. This will include flexible pathways such as CTE, HSCP and others. As this plan develops, more information will become available.

Educators can use this initial closure period to review materials and resources through a [lens of equity](#) and access. It is important to keep in mind the unique skills and abilities of each child, recognizing that home learning environments vary also. Educational resources that include clear instructions should be available in both print and online. Additionally, identifying a time when parent/guardians can contact educators virtually or by phone is important. Finally, coordination of efforts among classroom teachers, special educators, and teachers of English learners is essential for verifying that materials **sent home in the future** are aligned with student goals.

Internet Access Opportunities

As families look for ways to support their children at home, whether academically or socially, the Internet can be an invaluable resource. 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. The following is a breakdown of what is being offered by some of the major Internet providers in Vermont. A [complete list](#) is available from the Vermont Department of Public Service.

- [Spectrum/Charter](#) is offering free Wi-Fi to new subscribers who have a student in grades K-12 and/or college for 60 days (Call 1-844-579-3743 to enroll).
- [Xfinity/Comcast](#) is offering free Wi-Fi to low-income families for 60 days and free Wi-Fi hotspots to everyone.
- [AT&T](#) has removed all data restrictions and is offering internet access to low-income families for \$10 per month; their Wi-Fi hotspots will be free to everyone.
- [Cox Communications](#) has removed data restrictions for all and are offering the first month free for new customers. They also offer a reduced rate of \$9.95 for households with at least one K-12 student and participate in a government assistance program.
- [Sprint](#) and [Centurylink](#) have removed data restrictions.
- [The Federal Communications Commission](#) has a list of companies and organizations that have signed the Keep Americans Connected Pledge.

A Brighter Future

Educators and parents/guardians need to have both a flexible mindset and realistic expectations for supporting Vermont students at this point in time. It is essential that everyone remain as calm as possible and hopeful about the future. Peter Gray, a research professor at Boston College, shares this advice in his article, [Coronavirus School Closures: And Educational Opportunity: Anything that disrupts our usual ways of being can lead us to try new ways of being, ways that might in the long run be improvements or guide us to improvements](#). Focusing on the potential benefits of what we learn and how we grow due to the temporary closure of schools can be a valuable perspective as Vermonters work together to support students throughout the state.