

Effective Distance Learning Strategies

In this time of emergency school closures educators remain committed to providing a quality learning experience for students. In May principals of 2019 National Blue Ribbon School Awardees described key strategies their schools have implemented successfully. Amid myriad challenges, other schools might benefit from their examples.

KEY AREAS

STAYING CONNECTED WITH STAFF, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS

TRAINING AND SUPPORTING STAFF IN DISTANCE INSTRUCTION

SUPPORTING STUDENTS' DISTANCE LEARNING

SUPPORTING PARENT ENGAGEMENT



STAYING CONNECTED WITH STAFF, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Employ a variety of tools and methods for communications among students, parents, teachers, and other school staff depending on the purpose and the audience
- ▶ Provide a consistent and efficient system for managing and accessing communications
- ▶ Use periodic meetings to support connections among students and teachers

Great learning is driven by great teaching regardless of the method of delivery. **Communicate regularly with students.** This regular communication and collaboration can take place in person or online through a digital messaging center, discussion group, or even through the feedback provided on teacher-scored activities. We **ask parents which communication methods are best for them.** We do not assume that parents are all the same. Using multiple communication methods allows parents to hear from you in ways that work for them. Our school uses phone calls, email, text messages, the campus website, SchoolMessenger and Class Dojo.”

Wilbur E. Lucas Elementary
medium-sized suburban school in Hidalgo, TX



The most important thing during this difficult time is communication. I have **twice a week Zoom meetings with the faculty and staff and email all students at least once a week** encouraging them to continue learning and to reach out for assistance. **Teachers communicate with students and parents using Teams meetings, emails, Remind, and by phone. All teachers have office hours daily**, during which students can get almost instant one-on-one assistance with assignments and activities. The Guidance Counselors and School Social Worker monitor all students, particularly struggling students. We plan to hold events, virtually, for as much normalcy as possible.”

Atlantic Technical College and Technical High School
medium-sized suburban high school in Coconut Creek, FL





STRATEGIES

TRAINING AND SUPPORTING STAFF IN DISTANCE INSTRUCTION

- ▶ Use Professional Learning Communities to support teachers
- ▶ Support collaboration by school staff on instructional content, methods, and schedules
- ▶ Provide training and support to teachers in remote instruction

The most successful practice thus far in remote learning has been the **collaboration on curriculum and content by our teachers**. We have **weekly grade level meetings with teachers collaborating together on the content to be taught virtually**. This approach is providing our students districtwide the same content being taught, and individual teachers are utilizing Google Meet and other resources to provide meaningful instruction to our students.”

Ann Letort Elementary

small rural school in Washington Boro, PA



One instrumental practice our school has implemented successfully is **teacher preparation for delivery of instruction through distance learning**. Immediately after receiving news of our school closure, administration assisted in setting up **virtual technology training sessions**. With the help and assistance of our campus digital learning specialist, our teachers were able to set up their google classrooms within the first week. To provide resources and support to ensure continuity of instruction, **virtual staff meetings and virtual grade level planning sessions were scheduled with all campus teacher and support staff**. Through the collaborative efforts of the campus administration, school counselors, campus nurse, instructional specialist and digital learning specialist, teachers have been able to receive the necessary preparation to deliver instruction to all our students.”

Michael S. Ryan Elementary

large urban school in Laredo, TX





SUPPORTING STUDENTS' DISTANCE LEARNING

STRATEGIES

- ▶ Employ a variety of tools and resources to support remote instruction in different subjects and activities
- ▶ Use a single digital learning platform to provide, manage, and support online instruction
- ▶ Share learning plans with students and parents
- ▶ Use periodic meetings to provide remote instruction to students

As an elementary leadership team we **put together a weekly learning plan template that every teacher across the district uses**. The weekly plans provide an overview for students and families about what they will be learning, how they will be learning it, and where to go for questions. Parents can sit down on Monday and go over the plan with their child, get a schedule going for the week based on their own work schedules and reach out to the teachers with questions. Our students then have **multiple video conferences (via Google Hangout) with teachers where they receive core instruction and can ask targeted questions about their learning plan for the week**. This has provided great organization and a collaborative focus for our staff.”

C.J. Prescott Elementary
small suburban school in Norwood, MA



Our district has used the **Wixie platform for Grades K–2 and Google Classroom for Grades 3–8** to deliver online instruction primarily in the areas of English language arts and math as well as **Zoom platform** to conduct on-line office hours and class meetings to further support our on-line instruction. In addition we have provided paper copies to those families that requested it.”

Kyrene de la Sierra
medium-sized suburban K–8 school in Phoenix, AZ



Our school is **using an eLearning model that incorporates live virtual sessions with groups and individual students, teacher-captured videos of guided instruction, virtual assignments, choice board activities, and digital resources in academic and cocurricular subjects**. The multiple modes allow students to work on standards-based new [content] and review instruction at their own pace, including teacher feedback in real time. **Virtual gatherings allow teachers to continue to meet the social and emotional needs of students through planned lessons and activities that typically occur inside our physical classrooms.**”

Ocean Bay Elementary
large suburban school in Myrtle Beach, SC





STRATEGIES

SUPPORTING PARENT ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ Provide training and ongoing support to parents on setting up and using a remote learning environment
- ▶ Regularly communicate with parents regarding the types of communication that work best for them

We recognize that parents—especially of elementary students—are experiencing the challenge of both working and supporting their children. Therefore, over the weekend of the upcoming week, our **teachers send one email or post for the entire week with all the daily assignments and due dates**. Included are all the links and information regarding Zoom sessions.”

[St. Joseph's Regional Catholic](#)
small suburban K–8 school in Beltsville, MD



We put together a slide deck with **tips for parents on how to create a remote learning environment at home, things to consider when creating the daily framework that meets their individual family needs, and remote-learning school rules/family constitution**. Administration narrated the slide deck in a video to walk parents through. The first two days **helped parents set up remote learning in their homes**. We also gave some practice work for families to try out the home learning routines for Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, we added one new aspect and let the families get used to the technology. There was no new material the first week because the new learning environment and routines needed to be learned first. The school provides **encouraging morning and afternoon announcements to frame the learning day**. The announcements are helpful to bring the community together and send positive messages to our families. They also allow them to connect virtually with each other. We began to introduce new material in week 2. Parents provided very positive feedback.”

[St. Benedict Preparatory](#)
medium-sized urban K–8 school in Chicago, IL

