

Instructional Guidance for Distance Learning

MDE guidance

Distance Learning defined

Students engaging in distance learning have access to appropriate educational materials and receive daily interaction with their licensed teacher(s).

It is important to note that distance learning does not always mean e-learning or online learning. It is critical to provide this learning in a format that can be equitably accessed by all students.

As your district or charter implements a distance learning model, the Federal and State requirements must be followed. This means that students need to be able to participate in their learning equitably and have access to all relevant services and supports. Considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring all students in the school or district will have equal access to the learning and required materials, including technology.
- If using an online learning system, ensure it can effectively support the district's unique learning and teaching needs, including the ability to provide differentiated instruction as well as one-on-one support for students who need it. Regardless of where the learning is happening, supports identified on a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan must be provided (more detail below). Individual Learning Plans for English Language Learners must also be followed.
- Providing training to staff, students, and parents/guardians on implementation of your distance learning model and the district's expectations.
- Programming options for school nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, paraprofessionals, other school specialists and cultural liaisons.
- Tracking the attendance of both students and staff.
- Ensuring the distance learning model in use is secure and will not allow for the release of protected student or staff information.

Schools should provide materials for students to continue their learning. Each school would determine the most appropriate way to communicate and provide instruction for each student which could include some/all of the following:

- Paper packets or worksheets, which could be distributed daily by bus route or collected several times a week at a central location
- Textbooks
- Telephone instruction
- Online resources (take into account availability of broadband)
- Instruction via the school's learning management system (LMS)

Getting started

- Remember to take baby steps
- Remember that there is no one way for distance learning
- Take a self-audit: what resources do you have available? who is in your professional support network? who do you reach out to if you have questions?
- Set your own goals (daily/weekly) that are reachable and can provide checkpoints for yourself.
- Be careful not to get lost in the vast number of resources available. Focus on tools and strategies you can use long-term and regularly. How do you modify the best practices you already use to this way of learning?

Social-emotional considerations

- Share daily positive and encouraging feedback with students and families.
- Acknowledge student and parents' feelings, the difficulties, worries upfront. Students will be grieving loss of time with friends, loss of a sense of normalcy, and cancelation of activities. Provide an opportunity to share these feelings to increase capacity for learning.
- Keep as many classroom routines as possible including order of learning activities, celebrations, special events. How they look may be different, but consistency to what is familiar will help with the transition.
- Try to maintain a sense of classroom community using digital tools, passing along journals, etc.
- Avoid punitive or negative interactions around accountability to learning. Prioritize student well-being.

Utilizing best practices

- Set learning goals and daily objectives based on prioritized standards and communicate them clearly to students and caregivers as a learning guide.
- Align daily tasks to the learning goals and allow for choice and individual creativity for ways to meet the learning goals, including...
 - Menu boards
 - Tapping into students' strengths and assets such as their talents, cultural knowledge, interest areas, family-member expertise
- Have students set daily/weekly goals along with their schedule that are reachable and can provide "quick wins" for students during this time (i.e. academic, activity, personal)
- Consider offering projects that can be used across curriculum; work in teacher teams to create 1-2 non-digital projects for students to showcase their knowledge in more than one subject area
- Capitalize on a few high-leverage strategies and tools and stick with them rather than trying to juggle too many things.

Scheduling considerations

- Create a consistent schedule for yourself including:
 - Scheduled time to interact with students
 - Time for planning and prepping
- Consider using a block schedule at the secondary level and offer classes every other day

Reciprocal interaction considerations

MDE has stated that reciprocal interaction must occur on a daily basis or consistent with a class schedule. Reciprocal interaction means that there must be communication from the teacher to the student and from the student to the teacher. Ensure there is clear communication with students and caregivers as to when and how they communicate with teachers. Additionally, consider reaching out to families as to their preferences and accessibility.

Two-way communication

- If your district is delivering classroom materials by bus, consider written communication back and forth. Students can submit classwork, reflections, journals, etc. and teachers can respond back.
- Phone communication – set up a time to talk to each student.
- Digital communication – email, discussion boards, electronic submissions, video-conferencing

Teacher to Student

In addition to the modes of communication above, teachers could also consider delivering instructional contact via:

- Posting materials and communication on your district webpage
- Checking with a local TV or Radio station to see if they would be willing to broadcast content

Student to student

- Consider connecting students with each other in partners or small groups to provide an academic support system outside of the school walls. They could connect virtually or by phone.

Assessment considerations

Traditional tests may not be the most effective way to assess students in this environment. Consider:

- Project-based assessments
- Interviews/conferencing (phone or video-conferencing)
- Written assessments

Formative assessments and retakes will be important to consider in this environment.

Maximizing your resources

- Have students utilize everyday household options to deliver standards or daily activities (I.e. read out loud to a pet or plant; create an xy axis and graph using home items and take a picture)
- Utilize student voice! Tap into your students for assistance in designing learning opportunities that do not require anything digital.
- Collaborate – divide and conquer, building on teacher strengths in teams and share responsibilities in planning across grade level, department, or even grade bands (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-10, 11-12).
- Consider the community assets you may have available. Multilingual and multicultural leaders of community organizations and religious institutions that the community trusts should be tapped whenever possible to reach out to families that primarily speak a language other than English.

Role of caregivers

- Be cognizant of parent and family limitations and barriers to supporting learning at home, such as:
 - Older students caring for themselves and/or younger siblings without parental presence during the day.
 - Diverse educational or language background of caregivers
 - Caregivers trying to work from home and care for children at the same time
- As much as possible, design learning opportunities that do not require parental or guardian support or can be done with minimal guidance from an adult.
- When parental support and guidance is needed, include a brief guide for caregivers in their preferred language.

Equity considerations

- How are you providing accommodations and modifications to those on an IEP or 504 plan?
- How are you differentiating for the diverse needs of students?
- If you are using digital resources, does everyone have access? If not, how are you providing an equitable experience. For example, if most students are interacting with engaging, interactive digital curriculum, and a few students are doing paper packets, is that equitable?
- As you tap into new tools and content, consider the degree to which it is culturally responsive.
- Ensure you provide all materials students may need for learning. Be careful not to assume students have access to supplies (i.e. paper, glue, etc.) or learning manipulatives (i.e. rulers, dice, etc.)