

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUPPLEMENTING REMOTE LITERACY LEARNING A Back-to-School Resource for Families

Reading is a critical skill that all students must master in order to succeed in school. Reading is a developmental process that begins in early childhood and extends throughout children’s educational careers. The coronavirus pandemic has brought about new challenges for literacy instruction as learning in many school districts has transitioned from in-person instruction to distance learning models. Families can supplement literacy acquisition through a variety of literacy supports and activities while students are learning at home.

Equity Students bring diverse levels of background knowledge, literacy skills, and experiences to school. Many textbooks lack the cultural and ethnic diversity that taps into the interests and perspectives of all students. Talk to your child’s teachers about including resources, materials, and activities that will ensure all students feel welcome, respected, and valued.

Access The [homework gap](#)¹—the inability of students to do schoolwork at home due to lack of Internet connectivity—affects 27 percent of students across the nation.² This gap is amplified as many districts transition to full-time or part-time distance learning models. If you do not have Internet access and/or a device that will enable your child to participate completely in remote learning, talk to the school about how they will provide alternate means of instructional delivery to your child.

Online Safety As students transition to distance learning models, families should take care to ensure their [online safety](#).³ Explore the learning platforms and applications that will be used for online instruction and discuss any safety or privacy concerns with your child’s teachers. Talk to your child about online safety and encourage them to tell you about suspicious activities or interactions that make them uncomfortable. If your child is using a device loaned by the school or district, ask about the district’s policy on removing personal information once the device is returned.

CONSIDERATIONS TO SUPPORT READING AND LITERACY

The often-repeated phrase “children learn to read and then read to learn” has merit; however, it is important to recognize that reading is a developmental process, and children continue to learn to read past the early elementary grades. [Families can reinforce their child’s reading skills](#)⁴ using a variety of strategies, routines, activities, and resources. Below are some suggested supports to consider incorporating into home learning routines:

- **Read with your children daily.** For very young children, reading aloud stimulates language development and helps cultivate language skills that are critical to becoming successful readers. For preschoolers, reading out loud to them helps build important skills, like recognizing letters and understanding that printed type represents spoken words. For young readers, daily reading reinforces language skills and also helps build vocabulary and fluency—important skills in decoding and comprehension. [Older children also benefit from reading time](#)⁵; it helps build their vocabulary and improve their comprehension and listening skills. Regardless of age, parents can help their children succeed in an increasingly diverse and interdependent

world by including books and stories that recognize and value the contributions and perspectives of differing cultures, ethnicities, and linguistic backgrounds.

- **Ask your child's teacher for home activities to support your child's reading.** For early readers, mastery of [foundational reading skills](#)⁶ is a high priority, and teaching young children these skills often requires hands-on activities; ask about activities to support these skills. For adolescents, ask your child's teacher about reading strategies to aid in comprehension across content areas.
- **Scaffold your child's reading.** The purpose of reading is to connect ideas on a page to what we know. A [robust vocabulary](#)⁷ and sufficient background knowledge help students make these important connections; this is especially true for English language learners because they are working to understand a new language while, at the same time, applying new knowledge to learn from their reading. Without adequate background knowledge, it's hard for readers to construct a meaningful 'mental model' of the text. Prior to reading new material, you can help your child make connections by highlighting new vocabulary words and [building background knowledge](#)⁸ about the topic. For example, if your child is reading a story that takes place in a different country, examine a map together and locate the country, talk about the country's culture, [watch a documentary](#)⁹ or movie related to the country, and identify and explain new vocabulary words that they may encounter.
- **Use interactive activities to engage your child in reading.** Interactive reading strategies can help strengthen reading skills and comprehension across a wide range of age groups and reading abilities. For those learning to read, engage them by asking questions about the pictures, the story, and what they think will happen next. Read books that have repeated phrases that you can "read together." [Shared reading](#)¹⁰ helps novice readers successfully participate in the activity and make connections between oral and printed language. [Readers theater](#)¹¹ is a good strategy for children in elementary grades to help build fluency and comprehension. It is a great activity to engage the family in literacy activities; you can use a storybook that you already have or locate [scripts online](#).¹² Learning to read does not end when children enter adolescence. [Motivating adolescent readers](#)¹³ can be challenging; encourage them to select a book to read with their peers and establish a virtual book club. Writing is an important component in understanding the conventions of text and, therefore, aids in reading comprehension. For children who are already writing, ask them to write about what they are reading; reinforce reading comprehension skills in younger children by asking them to retell the story or draw a picture about the story.

RESOURCES

¹ NEA Today. (May 2020). "Coronavirus Brings 'Homework Gap' to the Forefront." Retrieved from neatoday.org/2020/05/04/coronavirus-brings-homework-gap-to-the-forefront/.

² Pew Research Center. (October 2018). "Nearly One-in-Five Teens Can't Always Finish Their Homework Because of the Digital Divide." Retrieved from [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/26/nearly-one-in-five-teens-cant-always-finish-their-homework-because-of-the-digital-divide/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/26/nearly-one-in-five-teens-cant-always-finish-their-homework-because-of-the-digital-divide/).

³ U.S. Department of Justice. (June 2020). "Keeping Children Safe Online." Retrieved from [justice.gov/coronavirus/keeping-children-safe-online](https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus/keeping-children-safe-online).

⁴ National Center on Improving Literacy. "Parents & Families: Remote Learning." Retrieved from [improvingliteracy.org/family](https://www.improvingliteracy.org/family).

- ⁵ Edutopia. (May 2019). "Reading Aloud to Middle School Students." Retrieved from edutopia.org/article/reading-aloud-middle-school-students.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Education. "A Kindergarten Teacher's Guide to Supporting Family Involvement in Foundational Reading Skills." Retrieved from ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southeast/pdf/REL_2020016.pdf.
- ⁷ Iowa Reading Research Center. (February 2016). "9 Tips to Build Your Child's Vocabulary at Home." Retrieved from iowareadingresearch.org/9-tips-to-build-your-child%e2%80%99s-vocabulary-at-home.
- ⁸ Reading Rockets. "Building Background Knowledge." Retrieved from readingrockets.org/article/building-background-knowledge.
- ⁹ YouTube. "Educational Documentaries: Netflix." Retrieved from youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvahqWMqN4M0GRkZY8WkLZMb6Z-W7qbLA.
- ¹⁰ Reading Rockets. "Shared Reading." Retrieved from readingrockets.org/strategies/shared_reading.
- ¹¹ Reading Rockets. "Reader's Theater: Giving Students a Reason to Read Aloud." Retrieved from readingrockets.org/article/readers-theater-giving-students-reason-read-aloud.
- ¹² Dr. Chase Young. "Readers Theater: Alphabetical Listing of Theater Scripts with Number of Parts." Retrieved from thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html.
- ¹³ All About Adolescent Literacy. "Adlit 101: Motivation." Retrieved from adlit.org/adlit_101/improving_literacy_instruction_in_your_school/motivation/.