

Considerations for Hybrid Learning Environments

A safe, positive, and structured [learning environment](#)¹, whether in person or online, is essential for student learning, especially during the pandemic when many students are experiencing uncertainty in many aspects of their lives. Building a hybrid or blended learning environment, requires special attention to overcome the challenges of distance learning to ensure that students feel included, safe, and connected to educators and their classmates. Because both models may include face-to-face interaction, health and safety considerations are of utmost importance.

[Health and Safety](#)² of students, families, and staff must be the top priority for those physically returning to schools. As staff and students physically return to the classroom, there are several matters that must be addressed to ensure the safety of the school community.

Physical distancing measures

- Consider how to maintain six feet of separation between and among students and staff in classrooms, hallways, and exterior grounds.
- Consider how to maintain physical distancing during normal periods of student movement.

Hygienic practices

- Follow recommendations for the use of [face coverings](#)³ throughout the school day, except during meals.
- Require all students to wash their hands regularly upon entering and leaving school grounds and when changing tasks or locations.
- Model proper hygiene practices, such as washing hands, using hand sanitizers, and proper wearing and removal of facial coverings.

Monitoring

- Encourage parents/families to [monitor students' health](#)⁴ before school each day and to keep them home if they exhibit symptoms of illness.
- Consider incorporating wellness checks throughout the day.

Protocols for sick students

- Make sure parents/families know that their children should not come to school if they have symptoms of an infectious illness and they should not [return to school](#)⁵ until ten days after the onset of symptoms, they have not had a fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, and other COVID-19 symptoms are improving.
- Notify appropriate personnel in your school if a student shows any symptoms of illness in your classroom. The school should isolate the student and contact a parent or guardian to take the student home.

Social and emotional well-being⁶

- The pandemic has created rapidly changing circumstances for many students and their families. Students' families may experience illness, loss of income, homelessness, food insecurity, or instances of neglect/abuse. Whether instruction occurs in person, or online, routinely check in on students' well-being and act on any concerns identified.
- Incorporate strategies to help maintain social connections, manage stress, and build a [supportive learning environment](#)⁷.

Equity issues have been persistent in our education system. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities in school funding, education policies and educator practices that deny Black, Brown, Indigenous and other students of color, students with disabilities, and ELLs the opportunity to learn and thrive. As educators move to hybrid learning models, evaluating school policies and practices as well as connecting students with technical, academic, and health and wellness supports is critical.

[Universal Design for Learning](#)⁸

- Integrate Universal Design for Learning principles into face-to-face and online lessons, activities, and assessments to ensure that all students can access content and participate in all learning opportunities.

[Culturally responsive classroom](#)⁹

- Include various aspects and perspectives that represent the broad diversity of learners in curricula, resources, materials, lessons, and assessments to tap into the interests and funds of knowledge of learners.

[Ensure a safe and affirming community for LGBTQ students](#)¹⁰

- Include visible signs (such as Zoom backgrounds) to show that you are LGBTQ affirming.
- Normalize pronoun sharing by sharing your preferred pronouns and create spaces for students to share their pronouns.

Technology¹¹ access is a barrier to learning for many students. Lack of access to technology disproportionately affects under-resourced students as well as Indigenous, Black, Brown and other students of color.

[Training for students and families](#)

- For many students and families, learning online is new and they will need explicit instructions on how to access specific information such as resources/materials, assignments, and online calendars. They will also need to learn how to turn in assignments, how to communicate with educators individually, and how to participate in online group activities.
- Share information with students and families about who to contact for technical support for loaned devices and connectivity issues.
- For students without access to technology, consider providing them with printed information on how materials, resources, and assignments will be provided to them and how to turn in assignments.
- For students with devices that do not have reliable Internet connectivity, consider providing resources and assignments on individual thumb drives. If available, provide families with a list of internet hot spots within the district.

Technology

Assessing student needs

- Consider giving students and/or parents a [short survey](#)¹² (either online or in print) to assess their technology needs, including number of devices in the home (tablets, cell phones, Chromebooks, computers), availability and type of internet access, number of persons using devices in the home, connectivity, level of experience with using technology use, preferred ways to access to technology, comfort with connectivity/device access, and preferred methods for receiving printed information if connectivity is or becomes an issue.

Netiquette

- Establish norms to ensure a respectful learning environment for all learners.
- Provide information and resources to students and parents about [cyberbullying](#)¹³, including how to recognize it and how to report it.

Internet [safety](#)¹⁴ and [privacy](#)¹⁵ information

- Share best practices and information with parents and students about online safety, including how to recognize and report cyberbullying.
- Familiarize yourself with information and best practices related to student privacy to ensure compliance in a virtual learning environment.
- Check to ensure the apps you are using comply with FERPA and student privacy laws.

Communication Protocols¹⁶ are an essential tool for creating and establishing consistency, creating expectations, and healthy boundaries.

- Provide students and families with your contact information and office hours. This information can also be included on your learning management site and in the signature of your email. Also, there are numerous web-based calendar apps that you may choose to use to manage your individual or peer group sessions with students.
- Consider your expectations for students joining face-to-face and virtual class settings. Providing students and families these expectations from the beginning will provide a sense of safety as they navigate the learning environment. You may want to consider the method for turning in assignments, the requirements for submitting work late, how students attending class in person will work with remote learners, etc. Flexibility is key, as there will be students struggling to complete assignments for various reasons.
- Within the communication protocols, it is crucial for educators to establish boundaries to prevent being consumed by the amount of work required for distance learning. Provide yourself a hard stop time every day. Permit yourself to unplug from work and practice self-care. If you're working from home, it is especially necessary to set aside spaces and times to turn off the electronics and connect with your community of support

Community in hybrid learning is more than digital space for accessing lessons and submitting assignments. Community is a social and cultural framework with established norms for collaboration, social interaction, and personal interconnectivity.

Student socialization/interaction¹⁷

- Plan time for students to interact regularly to promote development of social skills.
- Use small group activity to promote collaboration.
- Avoid using written interaction as the only means of student-to-student communication.

Collaborative expectations¹⁸

- Set clear expectations for equity of effort and assist in division of tasks for all students working in collaborative groups.
- Provide protocol for identifying, reporting, and resolving conflict within groups.
- Provide clear directions on how the group activity will be assessed.

Value diversity¹⁹

- Provide opportunities to recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate the value of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences.
- Provide alternative ways for students to demonstrate knowledge.
- Include resources and materials that represent the broad diversity of students.

Family²⁰

- Include parents in communications, as they are the experts on their children.
- Provide opportunities for parents to identify needed supports for their children.
- Share learning goals with parents and provide them with ideas and resources for extracurricular activities to support goal attainment.

RESOURCES:

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- 9 “Culturally Responsive Teaching: What You Need to Know.” Understood. Retrieved from understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/universal-design-for-learning/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching.
10. “In Response to COVID-19: A Checklist to Support LGBTQ Students During Distance Learning.” (April 2020). National Education Association. Retrieved from neadjustice.org/2020/04/23/in-response-to-covid-19-a-checklist-to-support-lgbtq-students-during-distance-learning.
- 11 “Internet Access & Devices.” WIDEPENSCHOOL. Retrieved from wideopenschool.org/families-and-teachers/access-for-all/#closing-digital-divide.
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- 13 “What is Cyberbullying?” (July 2020). Stopbullying.gov. Retrieved from stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it.
- 14 “Keeping Children Safe Online.” (June 2020). United States Department of Justice. Retrieved from justice.gov/coronavirus/keeping-children-safe-online.
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- 16 “Protocols for Virtual Discussion.” EL Education. Retrieved from eleducation.org/resources/protocols-for-virtual-discussion-1.
- 17 “Online Education and Peer Interaction.” The Pennsylvania State University. Retrieved from blogs.edweek.org/edweek/education_futures/2018/02/cooperative_and_collaborative_learning_student_partnership_in_online_classrooms.html.
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