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# An Administrator's Guide for Creating a Virtual Learning Program

In this guide we provide the top considerations when implementing a virtual learning program. In addition, we've gathered tips and resources for communicating with staff, students, and parents and for building and implementing a plan for virtual learning to extend options for student learning.

# ☑ Understand Technology Access

The first step to determining if and how your students will learn in a virtual environment is to consider their access to an Internet connection and a device they will use to access online learning materials, communications, and possibly live online learning experiences. Use this information to determine how to deploy virtual learning and whether you will need to distribute devices and/or Internet hotspots to ensure that all students have equitable access.

The easiest way to do this is to send out a short survey to parents of students interested in your virtual learning program. If your school or district does not already have a survey tool in place, consider using a free tool such as Google Forms. The survey does not need to be complicated; in fact, you'll likely get more participation if your survey is short and simple.

## Consider including these three questions in your survey:

**1** Does your learner have access to a device and an Internet connection to participate in online learning activities and receive communication from teachers?

✅ YES   ❌ NO

**2** What type of internet-connected device will your learner have access to?

1. _____   2. _____   3. _____

**3** Will students in your household need to share devices?

☐ Each student will have a device to use    ☐ Two students will share one device    ☐ More than two students will share one device

**TIP** If many of the students don't have access to an Internet connection at home, and your district isn't able to provide hotspots or devices to all students who need them, consider reaching out to local libraries, community organizations, or businesses for help. Many offer programs to help pay for Internet or rent devices to students in need.

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# ☑ Take Inventory of Your Current Resources

As you move forward with putting together a plan for virtual learning, start by taking inventory of the online programs that your district currently uses to determine how they can fit into your online learning plan.

## *Sample Audit Worksheet*

| Program Features | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Resource Type<br>■ Skill Practice<br>■ Instruction<br>■ Supplemental Learning<br>■ Assessment | | | |
| How many licenses are available for students? | | | |
| Which grade levels can use the program? | | | |
| Do teachers know how to use the program? | | | |
| Do students know how to use the program? | | | |
| Is it possible to get staff and students up and running on the in time to launch your program? | | | |

## *Implementation Tip*

Use your online learning resource audit to determine whether you currently have the sufficient online learning tools to deploy virtual learning, or whether you need to obtain more resources. As you explore your options, consider free learning tools such as Khan Academy and TeacherTube, resources featuring the capability for teachers to record video lessons themselves to share with students, and online learning programs that can be purchased.

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# ☑ Establish a Daily Schedule

The flexibility of learning in an online environment can be challenging for students, parents, and teachers. Set up a schedule to give students guidance on how to spend their time. As you plan the schedule, you will also need to determine how much time students will spend in synchronous activities —interacting with their teacher and peers in real time— versus asynchronous activities, working independently at their own pace. The proportion of synchronous to asynchronous activities will impact the flexibility students and teachers have within the schedule.

## Looking for example schedules?

📅 **Teachers**            📅 **Students**            📅 **Build Your Own**

## Be sure that your schedule includes:

**Check-ins:**
If students will mostly be working asynchronously, be sure to build time into the schedule for them to check in with their teacher and peers. Consider scheduling a morning meeting in which the teacher can review with students what they will be working on for the day, provide direct instruction, or engage the class in a discussion or even a game. Also consider including an additional short, daily afternoon check-in to discuss progress, answer questions, and share announcements. When scheduling check-ins be sure to stagger the times for different grade levels to accommodate households with shared devices. For hosting the check-ins, consider tools like Zoom, which has a free version, and Google Hangouts Meet.

**Office hours:**
Office hours are times during the day that the teacher will be online and available to connect live with students to answer questions and provide tutoring, intervention, or other instructional support. As with check-ins, the number of office hours that teachers need to host will depend on how much time students will be working synchronously versus asynchronously. The more students will be working asynchronously, the more office hours teachers will need to offer to support students.

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**Breaks:**
Just as students need to take breaks while at school, they also need to be sure to take breaks from working online. Build short breaks into the schedule and be sure that parents and students understand why it's important to take them so that they take advantage of that time away from devices. **Check out some example break ideas here!**

**Physical activity:**
Physical activity is built into the school day for most students through P.E. class and recess. Build a time for physical activity into your virtual learning day schedule, and provide suggested activities for students to complete to make sure they are getting adequate and appropriate physical activity. **Wondering how online PE can work? Check out this blog!**

**Subject Blocks:**
Block time during the day for students to work on certain subjects. Closures, consider longer subject blocks every other day to allow students longer periods of focused time.

**Catch-up time:**
Students will inevitably have an activity that they are unable to complete in the time allotted. Building a block of about 30 minutes into the daily schedule for catching up will help students stay on track.

**Create an attendance policy:**
For your virtual learning to count toward state-mandated attendance requirements, be sure to develop a policy for determining attendance. Some districts consider students present if they complete a certain percentage of the day's assignments; for other districts, students are considered present when they attend scheduled synchronous activities. Whatever method you develop, make sure that it is in compliance with state guidelines.

# ☑ Set Expectations for Staff

It's important to set clear and realistic expectations for teachers and other staff members about their duties as virtual learning educators. Administrators, teachers, and other staff members should work together to define expectations and then publish a resource that details what specific tasks staff members in each role should complete in order to carry out the learning plan and comply with school, district, and state guidelines for virtual learning.

## Sample Expectations Chart

| Teachers | Administration and Support | Other District Staff |
|---|---|---|
| **All Teachers**<br><br>■ Post activities to Google Classroom by 8:30 AM<br><br>■ Prepare online lessons<br><br>■ Hold office hours each day<br><br>■ Submit attendance based on assignments completed<br><br>**ESL, GT, Special Education Teachers**<br><br>■ Provide accommodations based on IEP goals<br><br>■ Provide feedback to students<br><br>■ Partner with classroom teachers to provide additional assignments<br><br>■ Provide instructional support to parents and students | **Principals, Assistant Principals, Central Office Administration**<br><br>■ Ensure communication of school closure<br><br>■ Engage in online planning meetings<br><br>■ Engage in professional learning<br><br>■ Support and monitor teachers<br><br>■ Maintain availability to answer questions from teachers, students, parents, and the community<br><br>**Instructional Coaches, Librarians, Administrative Assistants**<br><br>■ Provide online professional learning<br><br>■ Contact students who haven't completed work<br><br>■ Collaborate with teachers for communication support | **Paraprofessionals**<br><br>■ Collaborate with classroom teachers to support online learning<br><br>**Bus Drivers, Food Service, School Nurses**<br><br>■ Participate in online professional learning sessions |

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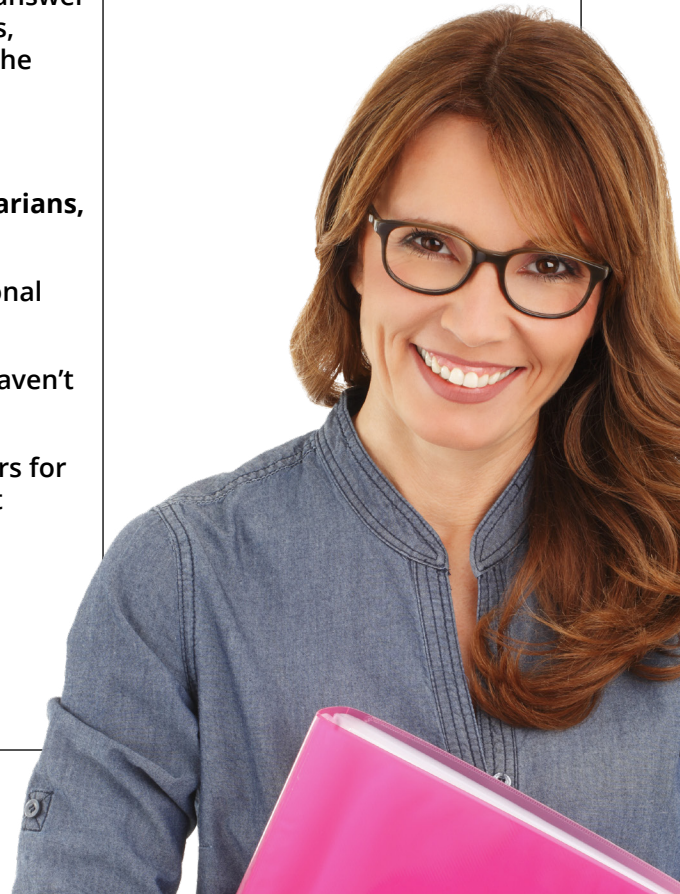
## Set aside time for staff training

Even the most tech savvy teachers need training on effectively teaching and communicating with students and parents in a fully online environment. You may feel like you don't have time for staff training, but the time spent on training will be well worth it. Be sure to schedule enough time to make sure teachers are equipped to support students.

Be sure to include these topics in your teacher training:

- Using the online learning programs that the district will be using

- Best practices for teaching in an online environment

- Best practices for keeping students and parents engaged during online learning

- Logistics and schedule for the virtual learning plan

## Prepare students and parents for learning at home

Virtual learning can't be successful unless students and parents know what is expected of them and know how to access their online assignments and resources. Create an orientation that walks students through logging in to their online platforms and accessing their assignments. Your district could also host an on-campus virtual learning practice day in which students work through the virtual learning day assignments on the virtual learning day schedule. The more practice that students have, the more likely they will be successful.

Once your virtual learning plan is in place, share the details with parents and students. In your communication be sure to include:

- Online learning platform logins

- A daily schedule

- Instructions for accessing online programs

- Assignment completion expectations

- Attendance policies

- Who to contact for technical issues

LIVE
WEBINAR

In addition to communicating policies to parents through notes sent home, email, and text messages, host live webinars in which staff members can explain policies, demonstrate online programs, and answer questions live. Parents will appreciate having the additional details and the ability to have their questions answered, and you will be able to share the recording so that parents who were not able to attend live still have access to the information.

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# ☑ Communicate with Staff and Parents

Launching a virtual program will require communication breadth and frequency that you may not be accustomed to. Use any and all available channels to keep students, parents, and community members informed.

## Here are tips and best practices for using different communication tools:

**Phone system:** If you have an automatic call system in place, call or text families with updates as they are available. This is the best way to distribute a time-sensitive message, and it will likely have the most reach because nearly all families have telephones, even those who don't have Internet service.

**Email:** Concise, direct emails are one of the best ways to communicate with families and staff members. Those who use email will check it frequently in search of updates. Focus on clear and compelling subject lines and email headers to improve the chances that recipients open and read the message. Also include a clear and prominent call to action if there is something that the reader or recipient needs to do. In every email you send, be sure to include links to your website or other resources where more information can be found.

**Website:** Your website will be the first place most families go for information. Use an eye-catching callout near the top of the homepage and link to a webpage that contains relevant news and updates. To limit frustration and confusion, make sure that visitors don't have to search for what they are looking for.

## Website tips:

**1** Keep content updated.

**2** Consolidate content into easy-to-understand sections.

**3** Make the menu options intuitive and easy.

**4** Include contact information for personnel families should reach out to for more information.

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**Social media:**
Utilizing the power of social media to share information about a school closure can be incredibly effective if educators and families follow your district's social media accounts. Through the power of easy sharing, messages can travel far very quickly. One thing to keep in mind when leveraging social media is that you will receive inquiries through those channels, so it's important to have someone available to monitor the accounts and respond to questions and requests. If your district has not built an audience through social media, you may still want to post information to those accounts; just be aware that you will also need to use other methods of communication.

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