



2020–21 Guidelines for Effective Distance Learning Practices

Many schools and systems have created plans for in-person, distance, and hybrid learning scenarios. Instruction Partners collaborated with educators, researchers, content-area specialists, and leading organizations to develop actionable strategies for maintaining high content and pedagogy expectations, as well as ensuring all students have access to high-quality instruction, in times of distance learning.

Building Culture and Community

Goal: Ensure all students feel safe and valued in the learning community; are comfortable expressing ideas and opinions; respect the opinions and ideas of peers; and are encouraged and inspired to seek understanding.

Strategy	In Action
Set clear expectations	<p>Establishing clear expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Create, communicate, and maintain norms for virtual learning environments (e.g., cameras on, mute when not speaking, guidelines for participation).▪ Educate students about digital citizenship and safe use of technology.▪ Consult with families about expectations and seek understanding about the technical, technological, and adaptive supports that will help families prepare for learning. <p>Maintaining clear expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Communicate to students and families your expectations for how students should spend their asynchronous learning time. Make expectations clear and concise, incorporate as many visuals and examples as possible, and share them in writing and verbally. For added clarity, give students and families a video recording of your expectations.▪ Make space for students who are having a hard time by sending them to a breakout room with another adult, to provide time for reset and reflection.▪ Share with families about student successes and challenges with the same regularity as in-person learning.▪ Seek understanding about incomplete assignments early and often.▪ Gather regular feedback from families about the distance learning experience, and incorporate that feedback into your cycles of improvement.



Strategy	In Action
<p>Cultivate a growth mindset culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey students to assess their level of comfort using virtual learning tools and platforms. Provide opportunities for students to learn more about specific features and “pro tips” for making the most of every virtual resource. ▪ Celebrate students for their efforts during synchronous and asynchronous work time (e.g., participating, asking and answering questions, completing tasks). ▪ Be open and honest about the challenges of remote and hybrid learning. ▪ Build in time for student goal-setting, reflection, and self-assessment. ▪ Respect variability in student and family schedules by allowing students to submit work outside of synchronous learning blocks. ▪ Teach students about the research behind growth mindset.
<p>Emphasize team-building and social interaction</p>	<p>Building relationships with students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn students’ names; use them early and often. ▪ Plan teacher–student check-ins focused on student interests and wellbeing. ▪ Collaborate with support staff, therapists, and other education professionals to determine how to support students’ social-emotional learning needs; designate time and resources accordingly. <p>Building community among students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allocate time for students to engage in team-building activities and games. ▪ Consider opportunities and norms for safe, casual social interaction (e.g., unstructured time in breakout rooms, choice games, filters on Google Hangout). ▪ Create whole-class celebrations to recognize collective distance learning successes. ▪ Include opportunities for project-based learning during coursework and as supplemental community-building activities. ▪ Modify traditions that build community (e.g., class mascots, classroom jobs) for a virtual environment. ▪ Establish grade level–appropriate morning meetings and/or community circles.



Strategy	In Action
Motivate and celebrate students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incorporate into lessons and modules real-life examples that are culturally and socially relevant to your students. ▪ Create virtual bulletin boards to highlight student work and interests. ▪ Incorporate enrichment opportunities and and co-curricular activities into the virtual schedule. ▪ Celebrate all forms of student success. ▪ Modify celebratory traditions (e.g., virtual field trips, academic clubs) for a virtual environment. ▪ Schedule special events (e.g., theme days) during synchronous learning time.

Resources in the “Guidelines for Effective Distance Learning Practices” series:

- Building culture and community
- Presenting grade-level content
- Making learning visible
- Soliciting student responses, facilitating meaningful discussion, and encouraging collaboration
- Assessing and providing feedback on student work

Access the complete set [here](#).

About Instruction Partners

Instruction Partners works alongside educators to support great teaching, accelerate student learning, name and address unconscious bias, and ensure equitable access to great instruction—particularly for students in poverty, students of color, students learning English, and students with disabilities.