North Dakota K-12 Distinguished Educator Distance Learning Exemplars

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Special thanks to the North Dakota teachers of the year, nominees, and ND Association Leaders who convened to create this document:

David Volk: Teacher of the Year, 2004

Mary Eldredge-Sandbo: Teacher of the Year, 2010

Karen Toavs: Teacher of the Year, 2011

Andrea Fox: Teacher of the Year, 2013

Amy Neal: Teacher of the Year, 2016

Leah Juelke: Teacher of the Year, 2018

Kayla Dornfeld: Teacher of the Year, 2019

Sara Medalen: Teacher of the Year, 2020

Linda Hope: Teacher of the Year Nominee

Heather Tomlin-Rohr: Teacher of the Year Nominee

Jessica Brandt: Teacher of the Year Nominee

Karyn Chiapella: Teacher of the Year Nominee

Sara Volk: ND Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Sara Bauman: ND Music Educators Association

Mark Herold: ND Music Educators Association

JoAnn Schapp: ND Science Teachers Association

Dr. Yee Han Chu: ND Association of Gifted Children

Paula Stroklund: ND Association of Career and Tech Ed

Tina Pletan: ND Literacy Association

Candace Brannan: ND Council of Teachers of English

Introduction:

March 15, 2020, was a red-letter day for North Dakota's public schools. On that Sunday, Gov. Doug Burgum ordered schools closed to in-person student instruction for the following week, and included a request that schools develop plans for distance learning. These plans became critical when the ban on in-person instruction continued through the 2019-20 school year.

Keeping student learning at the top of their minds, our network of North Dakota State Teachers of the Year stepped forward, offering innovative tips to improve instruction and ways to resolve some growing pains with distance learning. To continue this momentum, the Department of Public Instruction in July invited former State Teachers of the Year, STOY nominees, and other classroom leaders to discuss how they overcame the challenges that they met with distance learning. The valuable suggestions and guidance in this document resulted from those conversations, and we expect it will be updated and improved as the 2020-21 school year continues.

Our 2021 Teacher of the Year, Kristi Reinke of Jim Hill Middle School in Minot, aptly summed up her colleagues' work. "What I saw … was something right out of a movie. Teachers working together and literally flying the plane at the same time we were building it," she said. "I have never been more proud of my colleagues and my teacher friends in Minot, around North Dakota, and even around the rest of the country."

Building Relationships with Students:

What works for one student or groups of students will not work for all. The same goes for teachers, what works for one teacher might not work for another. But there are multiple ways to make distance learning work. All staff can help in the process of building student relationships. For example, paraprofessionals can make phone calls to check on students and bus drivers can drop off supplies or meals. All staff members need to be utilized whenever possible to help build strong relationships between the school and students/families. Communication is key! The more teachers communicate, the greater relationship they will be able to build relationships with students and families.

Techniques to Build and Maintain Relationships:
- Reading books (Zoom/SeeSaw/etc.).
- Whole class, small group or individual meetings (may have done silly costumes or had silly props to make more fun).
  - These meetings allowed teachers to check in, review work, offer help with projects etc.
- Chats (Zoom, TEAMS, Google Classroom, etc.).
- Used Instagram (with a teacher account) to stay in touch (high school students).
- Seesaw- used stickers and written feedback on work- can also do voice recordings and attach it to an assignment.

- Surveys/Polls- followed up on how students were doing, helped to check in and know how to adjust for students.
- Bell ringers that forced students to find an item and bring it back to discuss.
- Flipgrid- (free online app)- could hide it so only the teacher could see the student work, student friendly and easy to use- (great for collaboration and modeling).
- Recorded themselves at home and shared with the class (teachers and students- (get to know each other on a home/personal level).
    o Helped to show that we are not alone.
    o Made personal connections with the other family members and not just the learner.
- Snail mail/postcards.
- Sidewalk chats/visits.
- Holiday acknowledgement (i.e. May Day baskets).
- Collaborative projects.
- Offered feedback on assignments that include questions for students to answer (could be done in Google Classroom or SeeSaw).
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) video lessons, developed by counselors.

Issues During Distance Learning:
- Lack of technology.
    o Every household was ensured one device, but if there were siblings- not all students could have a device when needed (seemed to be a bigger problem for elementary students).
        ▪ Some schools are using CARES funding to buy more devices.
        ▪ Internet access was also an issue. However, in many communities', companies stepped up ensure that all families had an internet. connection, however, there are concerns that this will continue, for fall.)
        ▪ Access to a strong internet connection is foundational for distance learning to be successful (i.e. some apps require a lot of bandwidth in order to function correctly and, this can cause problems for students with weak signals).
- Are their legality issues for live streaming? (Thinking about student security. Needing secure links.)
    o Is it a legal issue if parents and students are seeing other students in the classroom?
    o What if Special Education and services are being provided? Does that violate HIPAA?
    o Do families need to sign legal waivers?
- Webcam requirements
    o Affect relationships.

- o Issue of equity.
- o No perfect answer.
- o Home situations also need to be kept in mind. We need to stay sensitive to what may be going on at home.
- o Using a green screen or a filter is a great way to help students who don't want to show their face on camera feel more comfortable.

Attendance, Participation and Engagement:

This proved to be a difficult aspect of distance learning. For many students, distance learning worked very well. Many students enjoyed, and even thrived, when they were able to work at their own pace. Other students struggled with one or more aspects of distance learning. Common struggles included keeping track of assigned work and resources, understanding instructions, regularly attending synchronous learning sessions, handing in work, not knowing how to ask for help, and transporting work and devices with them if they were switching houses or locations during distance learning. Last spring, grace, flexibility, and understanding were highly prioritized. However, with the probability of distance learning occurring in the fall, it is important to consider ways to continue to provide engaging and rigorous learning opportunities at an increased level of accountability. It is important to talk with your administrator and district leaders to ensure that as the teacher, you are following the schools/district policy on how attendance will be handled this school year regarding distance learning.

Consistency is vitally important in setting a high bar for teaching and learning. Teachers in schools where protocols were consistently followed reported the greatest success in maintaining a strong distance learning environment. A way to build consistency is to create a schedule and stick to it for at least the first quarter (continual switching causes stress, frustration, and confusion). When the entire staff works together as a team, the learning environment is stronger. Early communication to parents and students is vital in the success of distance learning. Make sure that every teacher and preferably as a school all communication is consistent and cohesive about all policies and procedures as we enter this fall. Everyone should be aware of what school will look like, and it would be easiest if they are addressed at a districtwide level.

Attendance Ideas:

Schools should consider who, how, and how often they are going to be taking attendance. Decide what platform your school is going to use. Some platforms to consider are

- Seesaw.
- Google Classroom.
- TEAMs.
- Weekly phone calls.
- Zoom for live classes.
- Surveys.

Engagement Activities:

It can be challenging to create a highly engaging atmosphere when teaching via distance learning. Here are some ideas that may help:

- Video chats (Zoom, TEAMS, Google).
- Show and tell.
- Polls, surveys, weekly forms (Pear Deck, Zoom, etc.).
- Open-ended questions: via chats, discussion boards, assignments, or Zoom sessions.
- Stop and shares during lessons (this helped to ensure students were still participating especially in the high school setting).
- Give student work choices to build and demonstrate understanding.
- Projects that overlap multiple content areas.
- Projects that pertain to family and community so there is buy-in from all.
- Projects around the house that related to life skills.
- "Passion Day" during the week, (teach the class something that you are passionate about).
- Guest speakers and readers.
- Field trips to businesses via Zoom.
- Guess the "mystery person" day.
- Establish a makeup day during the week.
  - No new work will be assigned. Teachers will reach out to students who need to get caught up or that have missed class.
    - Make sure you have a system in place for who will do this, especially at the high school level. If five teachers call each week it gets overwhelming. Decide who will oversee reaching out to specific students. An advisor or team system works well for older students. In some schools, paraprofessionals were utilized to keep in touch with students and help them finish assignments and/or to increase engagement while reducing stress for parents.

Things to Consider:

- High school students do well with set schedules (i.e. showing up to a live class via Zoom).
- It is difficult to hold elementary students accountable to show up for scheduled class times, since many need an adult to assist them. Instead, many schools/districts have decided to grade on completion and turning in assignments.
- Some parents are available to help only at night and on weekends. Teachers need to be aware of due dates for assignments because of this. Teachers should make sure they are giving students enough time to accommodate parent schedules if their support is going to be needed.

- Sometimes it comes down to the parents being on top of things. How do teachers hold the students accountable and responsible when it is truly a parents' accountability issue?
    - Many teachers found that phone calls were the best method to re-engage a parent/student into distance learning.
- One suggestion for elementary students is to do weekly assignments and use that as the accountability factor. This allows for the flexibility that elementary school parents may need to support their children with their learning.
- Career, technical education, and fine arts classes must have more hands-on opportunities to better engage students.
    - SeeSaw or digital pictures allow for collection of hands-on projects.

Grading and Assessment:

How this task was handled last spring ranged widely across the state and even within the same school building. Enter this fall expecting that stricter expectations will be enforced. Clear expectations, protocols, and systematic processes need to be explicitly communicated. Make sure that as a teacher, you understand how your school/district is going to handle this moving forward. Some schools/districts are doing grades every quarter with a minimum number of grades each week, while others are grading each semester. It would be best if these communications and decisions are done, at the very least, at a schoolwide level for cohesion. Schools and teachers may need to consider creating rubrics to help with grading, since most teachers found that open-ended questions and projects proved to be most successful during distance learning. Rubrics can also help create grading cohesion from one teacher to the next.

Assignments and Assessments:
- Projects/project-based learning.
- Choice between working independently or with a partner (students can find creative ways to collaborate even during distance learning).
- Open-ended questions.
- Continually asking questions throughout a live class meeting.
- Exit questions to ensure that students were present for the entire live lesson or watched the entire recorded lesson.
- STEM lessons/activities.
- Learning activities that leverage being "home" (i.e. backyard experiments, cooking with a parent, measuring furniture, etc.).

Apps That Work Well:
- Khan Academy.
- SeeSaw.
- Google (Forms, Classroom, Quiz, Slides).
- PowerSchool.

- ClassDojo.
- Remind.
- Pear Deck.
- TEAMS.
- Edpuzzle.
- Edulastic.
- InsertLearning.
- Smore Newsletters.
- Digital Notebooks.
- Flipgrid.
- Loom.
- Screencastify.
- Alice Keeler's Webcam.
- BoomCards- (track scores and performances and works on many platforms).
- Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.
  - There are many teacher resources on how to use digital platforms and include pre-created lessons to support distance learning.

Transition from In-Person to Distance Learning:

It is important to establish that last spring was "Emergency Teaching"; It was not true "Distance Learning". Teachers and schools were asked to change their teaching strategies, routines, and lesson delivery styles within a matter of days. For some students and schools, (specifically the ones that already had enough technology for each student to have their own device) this worked well. For others this was a very difficult and frustrating process. There was an overwhelming concern of how materials would be delivered to students, how teachers could connect with students and parents, which students needed internet/devices/both, how will IEPs/504s be met, etc.?

If schools are going to proceed with distance learning in the fall, one of the first things that will need to be established are schoolwide protocols to handle communication, attendance, scheduling, workload, technology needs, and platforms.

Schools will also need to establish a means of collecting/distributing this information to all staff, students, parents, and stakeholders. On top of this, each teacher needs to spend the first few days going over digital citizenship and setting up norms on how to handle working, submitting work, and collaborating in a digital world. Schools and teachers should also consider recording lessons, or even live lessons, to allow students to revisit learning and ensure that students can make up lessons if they miss class. Many teachers desire professional development regarding digital platforms and how to facilitate learning and relationships in a digital community.

Finally, schools need to come up with a school health and safety plan. Decisions need to be made on what will happen if a student/teacher cannot come back to school. What will the school do if a student tests positive? What if a teacher or staff member tests positive? How will a school ensure that learning continues in a cohesive way if learning must switch from face-to-face to distance learning? What will happen if a teacher is unable to teach for an extended amount of time (birth/adoption of child, medical treatments, etc.)? Will substitutes be available? These are all questions that need to be addressed and answered explicitly. Everyone should be aware of what school will look like, and it would be easiest if they are addressed at a district-wide level. Communication is key! Communicate these systems, protocols, and policies unless and until you are told they have been overly communicated.

Things to Consider:
- How to handle chats in an online platform (especially for elementary).
- When assignments go out, when it is due, how to turn it in, what platforms to use and how to use them.
- Set up a schedule and stick to it (i.e. office hours).
- Who is going to be communicating with each student/parent, how and how often?
- Select a consistent platform for teachers to communicate with students and parents.
- Inform parents and/or students how to set up notifications.
- Home packets for students (effective for some) that didn't have devices or that needed something extra to assist.
    - i.e. on Monday, the bus driver would take it out to students and pick up on Friday.
    - If packets didn't get returned, it made them difficult to grade.

Ideas to Continue/Distribute Communication Regarding District/School Changes:
- Radio.
- Newsletters.
- Surveys.
- Google.
- SeeSaw.
- Remind.
- ClassDojo.
- PowerSchool.
- Phone calls.
- Facebook/Instagram or any other social media site.
- Letters.
- Door-to-door with proper safety and social-distancing protocols set in place.

Communication Practices for School to Parent/Student:

Make sure that everyone is sending the same message, especially if it is a school or district-wide message. As an example, district administrators could create a "welcome back to school" video and share it with students and parents. The video could explicitly state expectations for distance learning. This would help to provide a cohesive message, especially for those in large districts. This could be treated almost like a public service announcement. Communication is essential, but at a minimum, a schoolwide approach needs to be established. This will cut down on a doubling-up of messages, or miscommunication of messages, that may occur which can cause individuals to become overwhelmed and frustrated. Once a protocol has been established, flexibility between teachers, parents, and students may have to be established if a student or parent is having difficulty, whether it is due to language barriers, time of day, need for extended time, etc. This will have to be done on an individual basis and will have to be worked out between all parties involved. Remember, the end goal is that communication is occurring and is fluid and continuous: thus, ensuring accurate and timely information is getting to all individuals. One idea is to survey parents to identify which form of communication (platform) works best for them and their family. If a student or a parent becomes disengaged, one of the best ways to reengage is to make a phone call.

Many teachers found it necessary to set up office hours to help keep a balance between family, work, home, and children. However, there were times that this had to be flexible for specific families and students due to jobs, parent availability, etc. When reaching out to parents, make sure you are reaching out for positives more than negatives. Also be empathetic as much as possible!

Helpful Platforms for Teacher-to-Student and Parent Communication:
- Google (Classroom & Meet).
- School websites.
- Social media.
- EDUcal.
- Remind.
- Blackboard
- Canvas.
- Edmodo.
- Seesaw.
- PowerSchool.
- Phone calls.
- Texting.
- Emails.
- Mail.
- Packets and notes sent home via bus.

Communication Practices for Staff to Staff:

Many schools stated that they met on a weekly basis both with their PLC groups, as well as an entire staff. This seemed to give staff a greater feeling of cohesion and gave them the ability to send out a singular unified message to parents and students. This also allowed staff to feel like their voice was being heard. Meeting weekly with PLCs gave teachers a social group, as well as a group that was there to support and assist with lesson plans. If distance learning is to continue into this fall, consistent and timely meetings must continue.

Time management is different when planning and implementing distance learning. It seemed to work well to try to plan several days if not a week at a time to allow flexibility of time during the day for students and parents to turn in work or contact the teacher. This also allowed teachers the opportunity to get caught up on grading and meeting with students that needed extra help.

Helpful Platforms for Teacher-to-Teacher Communication:
- Zoom.
- Phone calls.
- Texting.
- Emails.
- TEAMS.
- Facebook/Instagram or other social media sites.
- SeeSaw.

Lesson Delivery:

There was a large variety of how lessons were delivered. This ranged from grade level differences and teacher-to-teacher differences. One thing to remember is that successful lesson delivery changes from group to group. Many teachers noted that it may be beneficial to discuss with older students what works best for them. This may increase buy-in and engagement levels with learning.

Suggestions for planning and delivering distance learning lessons include:
- Google Classroom.
- Smore.
- Google Meet, TEAMS, Zoom (for instruction, small group, and individual learning).
- Videotape lessons for students to revisit learning or if they missed a class.
- Make sure students can see and hear you (teacher), as it is extremely important and greatly increases student participation and engagement. Some teachers did this through screen record on an IOS device and then uploaded to YouTube for students to access, others did this entirely through one platform such as SeeSaw or Google.
- Open-ended questions help to ensure participation and understanding.
- Submitting pictures of students doing the work- ensures authentic work and learning.
- Project based learning- creates greater buy-in and student participation.

- Teacher "office hours" allows students to schedule time either one-on-one or in small groups for reteach or enrichment opportunities.
- Color coding and scheduling helps students stay on task with work.
  - EDUcal is a- platform for students to create calendars.
- Interactive digital note booking.
- Bring in a community member for interview and Q&As for increased student. participation and engagement.
- Teacher-based Facebook groups provide ideas to support student learning.
- Career and technical education online resources provided by ND Department of CTE and the Association of Career and Technical Education.
- Student-centered approach puts the ownership of learning on the students and creates an environment where the teacher is the facilitator.

Supporting Students in Special Populations:

When it comes to special populations, there is a wide variety of needs, issues, and concerns. Be aware of possible language barriers, as well as technical barriers. When reaching out to any student/parent, be as empathetic and flexible as possible. Make sure that all school personnel are communicating and working together so students/families are not being double booked or being sent mixed messages, causing stress and confusion. Consider that there may be bigger situations/needs going on within a family structure than homework or school attendance. Try to take that stance and assume that everyone involved is doing the best that they can do at that given time, under the current circumstance. Multiple schools have found that doing a parent training night has helped parents understand the different platforms and know how to access all the information that their student needs.

Open communication needs to occur with all staff members that are directly working with students that are receiving modifications, Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), or accommodations to ensure students are always getting what they need. Staffing also needs to be looked at to ensure that all staff members are being utilized to the greatest extent possible (i.e. Paraprofessionals). Additionally, Special Education teams need to debrief regularly. These debriefs should include switching up who is working with whom, personality conflicts, change of pace, grades, communications sent home, etc. All these strategies can help reset a student's behavior and engagement levels.

Gifted and Talented Students:

Gifted and Talented (GT) falls under the Special Education umbrella. Do not assume GT students will be proficient with distance learning; they may become less engaged if they have already mastered the assigned work. These students may need to move through the curriculum more quickly to stay engaged. When offering work, make sure to consider enriching (focusing on the topic), extending (broaden the topic), enhancing (interrelated the topic), or accelerating (pacing faster) the learning. These strategies will help maintain engagement for GT students.

- Workload needs to be the same as peers but differentiated for their needs.
  - i.e. if you are appropriately differentiating, GT students should not feel you are giving them "additional work".
  - See *Differentiation for Gifted Learners: Going Beyond the Basics* by Diane Haecox and Richard Cash, or contact Ann Duchscher.
- Pre-Assess their skills. If GT students already know most of the content (not all), give an extension to their learning. Seek out other resources to amend learning.
- Bring depth and complexity into instruction.
  - See *Gifted Guild's Guide to Depth and Complexity* by Byrd and Van Gemert or contact Beth Ustankto (jacqueline.owen@vcsu.edu)
- Could students be moved into a different level classroom if work at the current level is not fitting their current learning needs? What would the role of student investment play?
- There are SEL concerns for this group. High expectations lead to high stress. Students input is important. They should want differentiated experiences. Students who are twice exceptional (2E) need to be carefully assessed for interest/readiness.
- There are students that are both GT and have IEP needs. It is imperative that these students are being granted appropriate academic experiences, while IEP needs are addressed. Unless there is concurrent attention to high potential, these students typically show inconsistent academic performance. Developing their talents will provide them a pathway to success. Contact Jackie Owen for assistance.

Special Education/504s Students:

To ensure all aspects of IEPs are being met, the Special Education teacher must be a part of planning and lesson delivery whenever possible, as IEP minutes matter. A common issue teacher encountered this spring was that it was meeting students at scheduled times due to the variety of schedules. Scheduling had to be done creatively (individually, small group, with siblings if possible, etc.)

Things to Consider:

- Utilizing paraprofessionals would have helped some districts
- Meeting minutes was challenging.
- In smaller districts, Special Education teachers were driving to individual students' homes to help with instruction one-on-one.
- Families are concerned and worried if students are getting enough teacher input and interaction to be fully grasping all learning.
  - Compensatory Services are extra services given (because all needs/goals/services were not met).
    - They will not be given during core instruction time.
- If services are delivered one-on-one, students on IEP/504s may not need as many minutes or as much time.

- If needs/goals are being met, this is okay.
- Legality issues come up here, as well (i.e. special needs students on Zoom).
  - Some platforms are HIPAA compliant, waivers, etc.
- Elementary is usually where students are identified.
  - How will we monitor for these students online?
  - How will we assess?
  - How do we identify?

English Language (EL) Students:

Work closely with the EL teacher to keep EL students on track, because sometimes EL parents are unable to fully engage. Many schools share EL teachers or simply do not have one. When working with EL students, consider the following:

- Need to provide a translator.
  - Expecting students to translate correct information to parents can sometimes be an issue.
- All work/communication sent home needs to be in the family's home language
  - Just because a family speaks a language does not mean they can read that language.
- TalkingPoints app can translate in many different languages.
  - Communication is in English on teacher's end but sends to parents/students in their home language.
  - This app uses the formal form of language.
- Many of these families are in lower Social Economic Status (SES), which affects their ability to have necessary items for distance learning.
  - Sometimes one technology platform is easier for this special population. You may have to be flexible to accommodate for these students and parents. This will help take some of the pressure off parents/students during distance learning. Keep in mind that translation for technology use was a major issue. If there are not accurate translations guiding parents/students on how to use technology, it will make distance learning even more difficult and frustrating.
- Many EL teachers rotate schools, but some have paraprofessionals in each school to help.
- Make sure you are reaching out and letting students/parents know you are there to help
  - Many have very high respect for teachers and won't always voice concerns.
  - Many parents may feel shame that they are not proficient in English and may try to avoid communication because of this.
- Evaluate EL students for giftedness, too. EL students are under-identified in gifted services. Signs to look for include:
  - Acquire the new language at a faster rate than typically seen in this population
  - Show an ability to translate at an advanced level.

- Show aptitude for negotiating between cultures.
- Display inventive leadership and/or imaginative qualities.
- Read significantly beyond grade level in heritage language.
- Assumed adult duties at a very young age.
- Show notable street smarts and/or rapid ability to integrate into majority culture.

Split families or Students with Unique Family Structures:
- Families in these circumstances can be difficult to get ahold of.
- Sometimes one parent/guardian does not have internet connection.
- Students may leave things (particularly technology) at one home and then work could not get done until returned to that home.

Homeless Students:
Chose a safe place to pick up or meet with them which maintains their anonymity and allows services to be provided. Students could utilize telemedicine services.

Migrant Students:
There are concerns about gaps with students as they move around and with how much they have missed or lost during moving and during distance learning.

Transient Students (tribal, polysubstance, etc.):
There are concerned about gaps with students who routinely rotate between tribal and community public schools. Many of these students move around frequently, so they cannot be tracked. Trauma is a huge concern. It can be very difficult to stay in touch with and difficult to receive work from these students.

Staff Mental Health:
For many individuals, the sudden shutdown that occurred last spring could be described as a grieving period. The continual uncertainty became very exhausting and difficult to manage not only for the teacher, but also when relaying information to students and parents. All the structure, support, interactions, and face-to-face contact was taken away within a matter of days. On top of that, the way that school/teaching/education had been done for years changed and had to be executed in an entirely new fashion. It became clear that new protocols, structures and schedules needed to be put in place. It was very difficult for many teachers to juggle teaching their students, teaching their own children, and even working around another adult also needing to work from home. Teachers and administrators need to be okay with taking time to take care of themselves. If they are not okay, they cannot properly support their students, staff or parents.

Activities to Support Mental Health:
- Read a book (or short story) for pleasure.

- Exercise.
- Spend time with family.
- Get outside.
- Take a break away from the computer.
- Set defined office hours.
- Be flexible with yourself and others.
- Accept that it is okay to say, "I don't know".
- Create a resilience group for staff or find SHORT webinars/videos to share with staff weekly to inspire/engage.
- App Marco Polo is great for SEL.

Stressors for Mental Health:
- Administrative support was key. Admin who promoted positive social/emotional wellbeing helped their staff maintain a healthy work/family lifestyle.
- Many teachers felt supported in the beginning, however, as time went on, they felt more isolated. Parents were not as flexible or as understanding that distance learning was also new to the teachers. Some teachers are fearful of lack of parent support in the fall.

Suggestions for Dealing with Criticism from Parents or Community Members:
- Limit time on social media.
- Look for opportunities to support colleagues in small but positive ways.
- Have a consistent phrase to share with colleagues when things get difficult.
- Remember that much of the criticism is a result of fear, stress, and uncertainty.

Student Mental Health:

It was difficult to determine the mental health of students during distance learning. Children are more apt to communicate about their emotions in a school setting. Many teachers see a trickledown effect to the students, based on the mental health of their families and parents. It is extremely important to reach out to parents, show support, and allow them to share their circumstances consistently.

On a day-to-day basis, it can be beneficial to students when teachers connect on a level that is not always purely academic (communicate about favorite hobbies or things they are doing to help their stress during distance learning). Do not make assumptions - time must be given to teachers and students to communicate about stress, emotions and SEL.

When meeting with a student, talk about how they are doing, help them move forward and alleviate stress. When in doubt, contact the school counselor. It is important for teachers to know their limit when helping students who are struggling with stress or other issues. It is okay to set boundaries or suggest a meeting with a school counselor if you feel that a situation or circumstance is outside your expertise.

Ways to help students:

- Try to make use of the time you have with your students to understand things that may interest and motivate them as well as how they are doing each day.
- Allow them time to talk and connect the first few minutes of class.
- Add encouraging comments to homework assignments.
- Schedule "office hours".
- Sidewalk visits.
- Read books together via Zoom.
- Student of the quarter/month/week (seemed very engaged when videos were used to show case/announce this student).
- Zoom lunches so students can connect with each other.
- Costume lunches via Zoom.
- Help students create schedules.
- Allow flexibility.
- Digital Celebrations (whole class, perhaps at the end of each quarter).
- App Marco Polo School is great for SEL.
- Choose a system to check on SEL (i.e. color system, stickers on Seesaw, social media checks, chats via school platform).
- Telemedicine, if schools are open to or allowing.
- Guidance Counselors actively involved with classes would greatly help support students while participating in distance education.

Concerns:

- How do we make sure the kids are okay if they are afraid of their parents hearing?
- How do we put safeguards in place for our most at-risk students during distance learning?
- How do we determine if a student is at risk during distance learning?
- How do we make sure we are reaching all students during distance learning?
- How were school Psychologists utilized?