

Maintenance of Learning: Guidelines for Families and Guardians

The “New Normal”

As Vermont schools assist in the state’s overall response efforts, our collective goal is to keep students, families, and educators safe as we work to slow the spread of COVID-19. This also means that schools will play new roles in the provision of essential services and have new delivery systems of education.

During this transition period, regular educational services will not continue, and students are not expected to make academic progress. However, parents, families, and caregivers can play a valuable role in establishing routines and maintaining student engagement at home. Since all families are unique, they can support their children in a variety of ways. This support can take on different forms and should reflect what is best for your family.

If it becomes necessary to extend school closure period beyond April 6, districts will provide further information based on State communications and guidance. Families are encouraged to continue to expose their children to learning experiences that connect what they have learned in school thus far to their home lives, interests, and identities.

Establishing Communication and Developing New Routines

Emotional Safety and Communication

Organizations around the country are working to provide support for parents/guardians and children in a variety of ways. The [National Association of School Psychologists](#) (NASP) offers the following suggestions below regarding how parents/guardians can respond to children’s fears regarding COVID-19.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents/guardians seem overly worried, children’s anxiety may rise. Parents/guardians should reassure children that health and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout the country stay healthy. However, children also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

The NASP further advises everyone to maintain a normal routine to the fullest extent possible. Educators should encourage families to develop a regular schedule that creates a “new normal” and provides a level of predictability for children and adults.

Ideas to Engage Children and Keep Them Thinking

Look for connections between academic subject areas and everyday life, and enable children to learn by pursuing their interests. Find opportunities to explore the outdoors responsibly and

observe the natural surroundings and changes that occur as we move farther into spring. Other ways to connect daily life to student learning can include:

- Taking a walk;
- Reading and following a recipe;
- Reading a book to a younger sibling or other family member;
- Writing a letter to a teacher or friend from school;
- Taking on new responsibilities at home;
- Being creative and engaging in crafts;
- Looking for patterns and relationships in nature; and
- Having a dance “party” at home.

Include ways for your children to experience social interaction without physically gathering with peers (Facetime, Zoom, group chats, writing to pen-pals, etc.).

Design a Home Learning Environment

The following ideas can be used to design a home learning environment:

- **Create a Learning Space:** When possible, the home environment should be arranged to provide children with a quiet space dedicated to learning that has minimal distractions (e.g., TV, cell phones, noise). If there is more than one student home, have children in different rooms if possible. The learning space for young children should be in the view of a supervising adult.
- **Develop a Schedule:** While at home, parents/guardians should develop a daily routine for maintaining learning. The daily routine should have planned time for educational activities (e.g., reading books, playing math games, etc.), exercise, arts, and socialization. Outdoor activities, if permissible, are encouraged whenever possible! This should be an opportunity to enjoy being with your child/children.
- **Identify Times to Stay Connected:** Isolation is a new concept for families and students. Teachers should communicate with their students and families on a regular basis to break down the barriers of isolation and keep track of how their students are doing. Maintaining strong student relationships and parent partnerships is key to learning at home. Parents/guardians need guidance and resources to partner well with teachers, and teachers need to hear from families about what might be preferred modes of communication and connection.

Internet Access Opportunities

As families look for ways to support their children at home, whether academically or socially, the Internet can be an invaluable resource. As the demand for both Internet access and available data has increased rapidly, many providers have responded with special offers. The offerings vary from free Internet to unlimited data. For the latest news related to internet connectivity,

please see the [Vermont Department of Public Service website](#). The following is a breakdown of what is being offered by some of the major Internet providers in Vermont:

- [Spectrum/Charter](#) is offering free Wi-Fi to new subscribers who have a student in grades K-12 and/or college for 60 days (Call [1-844-579-3743](#) to enroll).
- [Xfinity/Comcast](#) is offering free Wi-Fi to low-income families for 60 days and free Wi-Fi hotspots to everyone.
- [AT&T](#) has removed all data restrictions and is offering internet access to low-income families for \$10 per month; their Wi-Fi hotspots will be free to everyone.
- [Cox Communications](#) has removed data restrictions for all and are offering the first month free for new customers. They also offer a reduced rate of \$9.95 for households with at least one K-12 student and participate in a government assistance program.
- [Sprint](#) and [Centurylink](#) have removed data restrictions.
- [The Federal Communications Commission](#) has a list of companies and organizations that have signed the Keep Americans Connected Pledge.

A Brighter Future

Educators and parents/guardians need to have both a flexible mindset and realistic expectations for supporting Vermont students at this point in time. It is essential that everyone remain as calm as possible and hopeful about the future. Peter Gray, a research professor at Boston College, shares this advice in his article, [Coronavirus School Closures: And Educational Opportunity](#): *Anything that disrupts our usual ways of being can lead us to try new ways of being, ways that might in the long run be improvements or guide us to improvements.* Focusing on the potential benefits of what we learn and how we grow due to the temporary closure of schools can be a valuable perspective as Vermonters work together to support students throughout the state.