

# Instruction in a Remote Learning Environment: Universal Principles and Recommended Practices

## Purpose

In accordance with [Governor Scott's Directive Number 5 of March 26, 2020](#), Vermont schools have closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year. In an effort to support supervisory unions and districts (SUs/SDs), schools and educators' implementation of remote learning on or before April 13, 2020, the Agency of Education (AOE) offers the following principles and recommended practices for instruction in a remote learning environment. These principles and practices are intended to help educators reflect on and meet the challenges they will face as they begin to shift to analog and digital remote instruction. The AOE will continue to publish documents to further address topics listed in this guidance.

## Universal Principles of Instruction for Remote Learning:

### Keep Students at the Center

Continue building relationships and maintain connections through intentional outreach. Help students feel safe and valued. At minimum, plan to do the following:

- Plan for Student Learning: Build on each student's strengths, interests, and needs and use this knowledge to personalize instruction and positively impact learning.
- Develop a Weekly Plan and Schedule: Offer routines and structures for consistency, while at the same time providing the flexibility to balance think time, work time, and play time for health and well-being.
- Contact Families and Caregivers: Partner to support student learning through ongoing communication and collaboration. *Supporting families and caregivers supports your students.* It will not look the same for every student and family—safety remains the priority. Provide translations as necessary.

### Design Learning for Equity and Access

Plan and deliver content in multiple ways so all students can access learning.

- Instructional Content: Set goals using knowledge of each student and of each school's identified critical proficiencies that are aligned to Vermont's state adopted standards and transferable skills.
- Deliver Flexible Instruction: Consider how to deliver content depending on tools and resources accessible to each student. Delivery of instruction may include printed learning materials, phone contact, email, technology-based virtual instruction, or a combination to meet diverse student needs.

## Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact Jess DeCarolis, Student Pathways, [Jess.DeCarolis@vermont.gov](mailto:Jess.DeCarolis@vermont.gov).

- Engage Families and Caregivers: Communicate with families and caregivers about engagement strategies to support students as they access the learning. Families are critical partners. Provide translations as necessary

### **Assess Student Learning**

Manage and monitor student learning and plan what's next for learning.

- Check Student Learning: Use a variety of strategies to monitor, assess, and provide feedback to students about their learning.
- Make Instructional Adjustments: Use formative assessment results to guide student reflection on effectiveness of instruction and to determine next steps for student learning.
- Engage Families and Caregivers: Communicate with and seek input from families and caregivers about assessment results in order to inform next steps. Provide translations as necessary.

For additional information see [Assessment in a Remote Learning Environment: Recommended Practices](#).

### **Recommended Practices for Remote Learning:**

#### **Lesson Planning**

Disruptions due to school closure of schools can impact student availability and their schedules. When planning remote lessons, teachers need to take a less-is-more approach. Identifying those critical academic proficiencies and transferable skills which allow for more flexibility for student pacing is essential. **A schoolwide/district-wide approach to determining critical proficiencies ensures consistency across grade levels and content areas.**

Consider whether a student continually needs to meet synchronously with a teacher for a scheduled check-in or virtual lecture, or whether learning can occur over a given time frame by the student from previously prepared lessons and resources. An asynchronous approach to remote learning allows students to progress at their own pace, and helps shift teachers from distributors of knowledge to designers of experiences and facilitators of learning. The following is a recommendation of the maximum time of academic engagement by each student in remote learning activities:

#### **Total Daily Maximum Academic Engagement Time**

- K-2: 90 min/day
- 3-5: 120 min/day
- 6-8: 180 min/day
- 9-12: 270 min/day

### **Digital Guidelines:**

- Provide learning opportunities that balance structured, synchronous learning experiences with flexible, asynchronous learning experiences.
- Consider leveraging low bandwidth options like WhatsApp and Google Forms, and minimize usage of high bandwidth/data attachments or videos when possible.
- When planning, use technology intentionally to ensure the online lesson continues to align to the learning objective.
- When planning an online lesson, consider the student audience and the balance of media students will encounter (documents, audio, slides, video, websites, discussion boards, pictures, live chats) and minimize heavy reliance on one media over others.
- Prepare your learning and teaching space by minimizing the distractions around you while you work. Consider your backdrop, camera angle and lighting.
- Recognize that teaching face-to-face allows for a certain amount of improv, including spur-of-the-moment changes to lessons. Online teaching requires more up-front work, particularly when designing course materials.
- Plan for “unplugged” learning to promote healthy technology usage for all students.
- Continue or consider planning lessons in conjunction with paraprofessionals, multilingual staff, special educators, or any other related service providers.
- Recognize that while routine and normalcy are important in students’ lives, this may be the moment to further teaching practice by taking risks in designing new interdisciplinary learning experiences for students.

The Vermont Agency of Education will be scaling its existing relationship with [Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative](#) (VTVLC) to provide an optional online system to schools that will provide access to curated and standards-based curriculum and instruction for English language arts, social studies, math, science and health/PE to support continuity of learning for our students and school communities. This is targeted to serve secondary students beginning at grade 6 for the remainder of the school year. This option will be at no cost to schools or families.

### **Analog Guidelines**

- Create or select learning opportunities connected to students’ current reality.
- Take advantage of [project-based learning](#) to integrate content in meaningful ways.
- Provide hard copies of instructions that are free of jargon.
- Incorporate freely available resources like PBS programming and activities into the day.
- Incorporate opportunities for students to use transferable skills, especially communication, self-direction, and problem solving.
- Invite families and caregivers into the learning space and activities.
- Encourage students to use a variety of strategies to demonstrate what they have learned.

In order to support the continuity of learning through analog options, the Vermont Agency of Education is partnering with the Vermont Public Broadcasting System (PBS). This partnership will provide access to free educational programming resources via television broadcasts. Additional resources will be provided by the AOE and Vermont PBS, both on-air and online. The PreK through grade 12 programming is aligned to national standards and includes interactive lessons and suggested activities. PBS Plus (WGBH) has already begun airing educational programming for grades 6-12 during the noon to 5 p.m. time slot; programming for PreK-8 will begin Monday, April 6, on the PBS main channel which is broadly available throughout the state and does not require cable.

## **Personalized Learning**

Remote learning lends itself to providing opportunities for students to interact authentically with what they learn. When educators build asynchronous learning environments, students have more flexibility to move through content at their own pace. Creating a space for students to control how their education continues encourages them to be active learners in an analog or virtual space, rather than passive consumers of content. In addition, allowing students to give feedback on lessons can build trust and relationships in a remote learning environment and actively build a supportive community. This also sets the stage for a new type of relationship and level of learning when students return to school.

### **Digital and Analog Guidelines**

- Elicit feedback from students to improve and reflect upon online teaching practices/styles, as well as lessons and assessments.
- Provide a variety of different resources or entry points to meet students' readiness levels and learning styles.
- Encourage students to problem solve with resources they may have access to.
- Leverage choice boards, interactive learning menus or parallel units that align to critical proficiencies and transferable skills.
- Engage students in the lesson planning process by giving them opportunities to drive topics that interest them.
- Create opportunities for students to engage in content and transferable skills using current events.

## **Communication**

Teachers should have a consistent, concise, and accessible communication plan that prioritizes responsive and timely feedback. Student connections with their teacher make learners feel supported and connected, which is critical to their mental and emotional well-being. Responsive and timely feedback can help alleviate tension and stress when learners are working in a remote environment.

## **Digital Guidelines**

- Ensure all students have access to information through at least one form of communication (Mail, Phone Calls, Videos, Email, WhatsApp, Google Forms).
- Clearly define terms and/or ideas to avoid miscommunication.
- Establish norms for synchronous check in calls/video chats, or educator office hours.
- Assign note-takers and chat moderators to build community with student groups during synchronous check in calls/video chats.
- Remind students how to best communicate with their teacher and, when appropriate, peers.
- Develop guidelines for teacher response times and include all relevant staff members, especially paraprofessionals, multilingual staff, special educators, and any other related service providers.
- Establish and follow any district guidelines and communication plans when needing to report on student well-being or student crisis.

## **Analog Guidelines**

- Identify a process for making materials, including library books, available to families.
- Send home information that includes content represented through multiple modes (e.g., text, diagram, graphic organizers and illustrations).
- Communicate clear expectations for assigned work.
- Leverage the SU/SDs mass communication resources to text students and families with links to content that are accessible by cellphone, when possible.
- Call students and their families and caregivers in order to maintain relationships.
- Provide families and caregivers with sample schedules that are balanced between independent work and work supported by adults.

While the transition from in-school teaching to remote teaching and learning will neither be simple nor easy, educators from across the country are rallying together to adjust their practices to meet the needs of their students. Learning is a personal, lifelong process that leads to change, including the ability and willingness to adapt. Teachers, students and families are collaborating together to design and implement systems of learning that will sustain students throughout the remainder of the school year, and perhaps provide new opportunities for students to learn in authentic, meaningful ways.

## **Resources for Remote Learning**

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. Check with your local provider for offerings, or [The Federal Communications Commission](#), which has a list of companies and organizations that have signed the Keep

Americans Connected Pledge. For Vermont-specific information, please visit the Department of Public Service website for information on [new connectivity services](#).

Please also see the AOE's [Continuity of Learning Guidelines for PK-5 Families](#) and [Continuity of Learning Guidelines for 6-12 Families](#).

**Digital Resources:**

[Up and Running VTVLC Workshop](#)

[Enabling Distance Learning using Hangouts Meet](#) from Google for Education

[Tips for Enabling Distance Learning through G Suite & Chrome](#)

[Remote Learning Resources for PK-2](#)

[Remote Learning Resources for Upper Elementary Grades](#)

[Bright by Text](#)

[Learn at Home for All Students](#)

[COVID-19 Featured Resources from VTVLC](#)

[COVID-19: Featured Resources from NEASC](#)

[14 Tips for Helping Students with Limited Internet Have Distance Learning](#)

[Distance Learning: 6 UDL Best Practices for Online Learning](#)

**If you have questions about this document or would like additional information the following AOE staff are available to support you:**

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