Distance and e-learning Basics

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Table of Contents
Framing a Distance Learning Program
Strategies and Principles
FAQs

FRAMING A DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

Jargon:
Synchronous: occuring at the same time
Ex: chat, text, phone call, video conference

Asynchronous: occurring at different times
Ex: email, discussion board, grading feedback

Cognitive Load: the brain's working memory
7 ± 2 new ideas is the average amount of cognitive tasks an adult can balance. For K-12 learners, 5 ± 2 is recommended. For beginning a distance learning program, probably less than 5 should be expected.

Theories to Draw From:
Transactional distance theory
- More than just a geographic distance, there's a pedagogy about how to instruct at a distance leveraging:
  - Structure (organization of course and instruction)
  - Learner autonomy (considering the students' level of self-directedness)
  - Dialogue – bridges the gaps between those two things.
    - Between instructor and student (any communication)
    - Dialogue between student and material (graphic organizer)
- The lower the autonomy, and the less structure, the more important the communication becomes.

Interaction Equivalence Theory:
- How do we create deep and meaningful learning for our students?
  - Interactions between student and instructor
  - Interactions between Student and material
  - Interactions between Student to student
- As long as one of those interactions is of a high level/quality, you can have quality learning

Needs analysis/Reality Check:
Teachers – we can provide quality education to students but need to have realistic expectations
Students – they will be at really different places in terms of learning autonomy
Families –some will have many children at home, be working or have sick relatives
Technologies – dont have to be big/fancy, expensive; school printers and photocopiers can be crucial

STRATEGIES AND PRINCIPLES

- Simplicity, especially in presentation of information. If you're looking for 'fun' things, do it in the activities or interactions
- New Classroom Procedures – it's like the beginning of the year, remind and reboot simple things so that they know what to expect and can get oriented
- Leverage asynchronous strategies! Make things optional or recorded
- Social presence – make yourself available, dedicate time into activities and plans to include social interaction time
- Use the "deli!" You don't have to create everything on your own, right now. Use prepared content where you can find it
- Prepare at least one week ahead: Emergencies or tech complications happen for you and for students families, might need extra time to print/ready materials or create online tools
- Utilize "Just-in-time-teaching" techniques: manageable, bite-sized quick feedback to incorporate short-term adjustments

Dinner Party Analogy:
The [e-learning guide analogy](#) illustrates how cognitive load can be high at the beginning of a transition. Ease into the process by connecting new knowledge to things that students and families already know. Some things translate easily, other things will take more effort. But it doesn't have to be bigger/more intense than necessary.

- Think about the invitation to learning, give them context about what kinds of things to expect (welcome letter, or introduction to reboot of school)
- Portion or chunk information into manageable pieces
- Be reassuring and clear in communication
- Plan the environment: it doesn't have to be perfect, but you should be well prepared

Guiding Principles:
- Maintain and nurture relationships (distance theory)
- Reduce cognitive load (leverage working memory)
- This is an opportunity! Especially for shy students, or students with health or emotional struggles.

Attendance:
MDE definition for online learning providers is a single online login.
Every Distance Learning Plan must state how that single online login will be accounted for (if this is the attendance method the school chooses to adopt). Follow any new guidance from MDE and your district's specific policies.

- Google forms are time stamped etc. You can make these "asks" fun, too, or incorporate social-emotional learning or physical wellness.

<u>Important Considerations regarding attendance:</u>
Make advanced communication with law-enforcement/social workers so that plans regarding student wellness checks are clear on both sides.

- What constitutes truancy, and when should authorities be notified about a concern for student safety?
- Ask them how many days it will take for them to make a child-wellness call.
- Ask about their policies to support you, and check your policies.
- Directors, please take care of your staff. Consider policies or methods to check-in with staff to ensure safety for them as well.

Anytime you can work social-emotional content into your projects, do so. Students will include material in writing that they might not share in class. Incorporate wellness pieces when/where you can.

FAQs

Q: What is distance/remote learning vs e-learning?
A: Distance/remote learning goes back in history with military officers or correspondence learners. It includes any learning away from the educational institution.
Online or e-learning makes use of tools online, and can involve more interaction.

Q: How will student collaboration work into distance learning?
A: It depends on the materials that you are using, and the resources available to you. Facilitating communication or interaction between students is going to be more accurate than collaboration. Use any resources families and students are already familiar with.

Q: Are exit slips examples of just-in-time teaching?
A: If they are followed up with by a teaching strategy they are. You get quick feedback from students, but then need to follow up with a change, adjustment or affirmation of what you're going to do next.

Q: Why do you advise doing less synchronous activities? Can't we still expect kids to keep their typical daily class routines/schedules?
A: Having a schedule is great/important. Create one for yourself and your families. Build-in wiggle room, you don't need to be filling 7.5 hrs of content for yourself or them. Create blocks of time, consider alternating subjects on different days. Placing an emphasis on synchronous activities can put a heavy burden on families without consistent availability or access to the technologies being used.

Q: It would be great to hear more about the balance between office hours and being 'on call' to answer all student parent emails/calls. Do you stagger office hours for teachers, social workers, and support staff?
A: See sample schedules in the webinar/slides. Making yourself available at different points in the day is important.

Q: How much time are you spending with each child?
A: Students and families will be in very different situations (some with teachers for family members, some families completely unfamiliar). The needs will be different, but it's ok if you have different types and amounts of contact with different students.

Q: What does daily interaction with a licensed teacher mean?
A: A daily interaction is at least one outreach from the teacher and a response from each student – could be a morning meeting type of question, sent via email, that each student is expected to respond to. Think about if the student doesn't have internet – text or other options are available. *It is important that teachers aren't forced to rely on their own technology to do this engagement.* Look to online technology that can protect teachers – email to text, or getting old

phones for teachers. Check with your school's policies and guidelines about what is reasonable and expected.

Q: What do you do if students don't respond to the teacher outreach?
A: See attendance section.

Q: What might the first day of e-learning look like? Thinking about getting everyone set up and friendly with new platforms or methods of communication, thoughts?
A: Yes, start with small learning objectives in the first couple of weeks, slowly scaffold and build up.

Q: Does a login to just one class count for attendance?
A: It depends on the County's procedure for truancy. Attendance (for purposes of funding) at a school is that they login once to count as 'present' (but you should also reference your school's distance learning plan). Truancy is about protection, and you'll need to work with truancy social work policies to understand what qualifies as truancy. See Attendance section.

Q: I assume we need to articulate our specific attendance protocols with these types of details (when the state comes asking). Does CCS have a template we can use to start from?
A: See [CCS Student and Family Handbook](#) to reference their approach.

Q: Does attendance check have to be time-stamped or just date-stamped?
A: To date, the decision seems to be that date-stamped is the essential component. Keep a record of phone calls. Follow the most recent guidance from the Education Commissioner and MDE as it comes out. If it's in your plan and there are no other higher guidelines otherwise, then follow your school or district plan.

Q: How can you leverage your team to meet needs according to staff strengths?
A: It's important to consider the cognitive load piece of this. Many teachers are independent, so consider building in teams later down the road rather than overwhelming staff right away with too many changes. As much as teachers can, collaborate and share ideas for things like daily check-ins. Make spaces for teachers to share ideas and dialogue/confer if they want.

Q: Clarification: We can't even update families on our distance learning plans before March 30? We are not allowed to set up accounts, communicate expectations or teach – we are just meant to give access to resources?
A: According to the commissioner, schools have eight days to recreate a whole new learning system for MN students. The distance learning plan could last potentially through the end of the school year. It's an enormous task, so this small amount of time is being set aside for the creation of materials, procedures, and systems. You can communicate with families about

expected changes and establish lines of communication, and you should be maintaining relationships, but instruction should not be occurring.

Q: How can we best support overwhelmed parents?
A: It's going to look differently for different age groups. The more you can clearly lay out what expectations will be, the better. Parents should not be considered paraprofessionals unless they are on the payroll. The more we expect of parents, the less they may be able to meet those expectations.

Q: Yes and how do we do that, I'm a para, I want to help, so do I video chat?
A: Work to ask and figure out what needs and resources parents have at their disposal. See the webinar [Effective Practices for Online Special Education](#) for more information.

Q: At school, we don't have staff 1 to 1 with students without being on camera within the building. If 1 to 1 staff-student video calls start happening, is there anything to consider in an online interaction?
A: Depends on options/resources school has. There are recording options on many services now, and chats can be saved as well. You can also have more than one person in a hangout or chat (with/without video), if that's a concern.

Staff should not be friends with any students on social media. Make or use a policy regarding that. Be clear about whether staff can report to the building during this time and what expectations are for that. Be clear about the policy and resources being used, so that you are not relying on one-to-one video with students as a general rule.

Q: We are at the end of Q3 classes and are trying to figure out what to do about grades/credits.
A: ACNW is encouraging high schools, especially those that serve a population of students at risk of dropping out, to be very generous this spring. Focus first and foremost on social emotional learning; kids' cognitive load right now, especially if they are in an unhealthy or unstable home environment, just can't tackle a heavy lift academically. Second, ACNW encourages schools to make all classes this quarter pass / fail. Literally every post-secondary institution will understand; they all have the same context and are struggling with the same questions of how to educate their students without contact. Third, ACNW's guidance is that any senior who was on track to graduate March 15 should be allowed to graduate this spring. Again, this is unprecedented and we don't want to penalize children for something they can't control.