



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - July 24, 2020

Guidance on Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations and Remote Learning

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents, Collaborative Leaders, and Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools,

As a supplement to DESE's [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#) (*download*), we are providing districts and schools with the attached remote learning guidance and the attached guidance for the following in-school classes that require additional safety considerations this fall:

- Arts: Chorus, band, theater, dance, and visual arts
- Physical education

The arts, physical education, and other enrichment courses are an integral part of the learning experience for every student at every grade level, and we strongly encourage schools and districts to continue providing these classes to students this fall. Adaptations to these courses, however, are necessary to ensure the safety of students and staff. Please note that this guidance may be revised as we continue to monitor COVID-19 trends and the latest medical research.

The remote learning guidance provides additional detail on remote learning expectations, program models districts may consider, and considerations for implementing various models.

The document includes:

- **Important information about policy requirements and related guidance for remote learning** this fall
- Criteria for meeting **foundational technology needs**, and
- Conditions and considerations for **selecting an appropriate remote learning option for your school or district.**

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations for Fall 2020

July 24, 2020

Introduction

As a supplement to DESE's [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#) (*download*), we are providing districts and schools with guidance for the following in-school classes which require additional safety considerations this fall:

- **Arts: Chorus, band, theater, dance, and visual arts**
- **Physical education**

This document also provides guidance on shared equipment for these and other courses, including materials for art classes, computers, and, for younger students, toys like building blocks.

This guidance is being released in late July 2020 and may be revised as we continue to monitor COVID-19 trends and the latest medical research.

We will issue additional guidance on vocational/technical classes, extracurricular activities, school performances, competitions, and large gatherings.

Please note: Detailed guidance on youth sports will likely be issued in early August. A taskforce with representatives from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA), the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), and infectious disease physicians and other public health experts, is working to identify guidelines for youth sports and how youth sports can be played safely this fall. Currently, MIAA has approved September 14, 2020 as the start date for any fall sports that will be allowed to play under the forthcoming state guidelines.

Importance of the arts and physical education

The arts, physical education, and other enrichment courses are an integral part of the learning experience for every student at every grade level. We strongly encourage schools and districts to continue providing these classes to students this fall.

Adaptations to these courses, however, are necessary to support the safety of students and staff. Even though these activities require additional logistics, we are confident that they can and should continue this fall, as outlined in the following pages.

In this document, we focus on guidance for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures due to increased respiration or sharing of equipment, and we include guidance specific to each type of course. These guidelines are designed to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

Core health and safety practices

In our Initial Fall Reopening Guidance, we put forth the goal of the **safe** return of as many students as possible to in-person school. **This requires us to establish a new culture of health and safety in our schools this fall. It is not one mitigation strategy, but a combination of several strategies that will substantially reduce the risk of transmission.**

The core health and safety strategies are summarized below. For more detailed information, please see other DESE guidance, including the [Initial Fall Reopening Guidance](#) (*download*) and [Facilities and Operations Guidance](#) (*download*).

- **Stay at home if not well.** All students and staff should stay home if they are not feeling well, have any COVID-19 symptoms, or are in a household with someone who has recently tested positive COVID-19.
- **Masks are among the most important measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.** We require all staff and students second grade and above to wear masks, and younger students are strongly recommended to wear masks.
- **Physical distance greatly reduces the risk of transmission.** In general, 6 feet is the recommended distance between individuals where feasible. The minimum distance required is 3 feet, which is medically permitted when wearing masks.
- **Hand hygiene is critical.** We require frequent handwashing or hand sanitizing.
- **Create cohorts and assign seats.** As feasible, cohorts of the same students taking part in the same activity should be created. Smaller cohorts are preferred when feasible.
- **Maximize ventilation.** For the courses and activities outlined in this guidance, ventilation, including holding classes outdoors, can be an important consideration.

General guidance for courses requiring additional safety considerations

Courses that require enhanced health and safety measures

Chorus, singing, brass or woodwind instrument use, physical education activities, dance, and theater require enhanced health and safety measures, because they may involve increased respiration.¹ Research into optimal ways to maximize safety in these types of activities is ongoing. As a result, in consultation with our medical advisors, our guidance at this time is intentionally conservative and recommends modifications to minimize these elevated risks.

We strongly encourage these courses and activities be held fully or partially online if possible. If they are held in person, we strongly encourage – and at times require – these activities to occur outdoors. Safety requirements for these activities are as follows:

For chorus, singing, musical theater, and using brass or woodwind instruments:

- **If outdoors, with masks encouraged if possible,** these activities can occur with at least 10 feet of distance between individuals.
- **Note: At this time, these activities are not permitted indoors.**

For non-musical theater:

- **If outdoors, with masks encouraged if possible**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **If indoors, with masks required**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **Note: These activities cannot occur indoors without a mask.**

For physical education activities and dance:

- **If outdoors, without masks**, these activities can occur with 10 feet of distance between individuals.
- **If outdoors, with masks required**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **If indoors, with masks required**, these activities can occur with 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- **Note: These activities cannot occur indoors without a mask.**

Courses that involve regular sharing of equipment

Many courses and activities use equipment and materials that are regularly shared between students, including music, visual arts, and physical education. The sharing of equipment and materials (e.g., building blocks, computers) is permitted with the following modifications.

Require students to wash hands, wear masks, and maintain distance

- Students should wash or sanitize hands before and after using equipment;² frequent handwashing is likely the best way to protect against transmission from surfaces.
- Ideally, students must be 6 feet apart. When wearing masks, 3 feet is the minimum distance allowed between students (seat edge to seat edge). Masks must cover the nose and mouth and be on at all times if students are less than 6 feet apart or using shared equipment.

Minimize and modify shared equipment usage

- **Consider lesson plans that minimize the use of shared equipment.**³ If feasible, reduce class sizes for classes requiring equipment to reduce the need for equipment sharing.
- **If feasible, procure additional pieces of equipment in order to limit sharing.** This may not be possible for more expensive equipment (e.g., cameras) but may be possible for other types (e.g., some art supplies).
- **Assign specific students to specific pieces of equipment or workstations** (e.g., computers, art stations) that they can use for each class session. This is similar to having assigned seats in classrooms so that specific students are always near the same other students.

- **If there is not enough equipment for each student to have their own, consider creating cohorts, e.g., having students work in pairs or small groups** and keeping those groups the same.
 - One student can physically touch the equipment (e.g., camera) and the other students can play roles that do not involve physically touching the equipment (e.g., arranging items to be photographed).
 - If it is possible for the students to wipe down/clean the equipment part of the way through class, students can switch roles. Otherwise, students can swap roles in the next class session.
- **Equipment that touches the eyes or mouth (e.g., cameras) can be shared if a disposable protective cover is added** and students do not directly breathe into the item (for example, woodwind instruments cannot be shared). Disposable protective covers should be removed, disposed of and replaced with a new cover between uses, and the equipment should be cleaned between uses by students or custodial staff.
- **Instruments that do not come into contact with the mouth (e.g., piano) can be shared** if cleaned by students or custodial staff between uses. Woodwind or brass instruments (e.g., flute, saxophone, trumpet, clarinet) cannot be shared.
- **Do not share equipment or objects that are hard to clean and disinfect** (e.g., any materials with fabric or irregular surfaces such as stuffed animals or playdough).⁴

Increase shared equipment cleaning

- **Shared equipment should be wiped down before and after each use** (so there are ideally two wipe-downs between each student's use). Students or custodial staff could wipe down/clean equipment as appropriate.
 - An [EPA approved disinfectant](#) should be made available in each room for this purpose. Sufficient inventory of disinfectant supplies should be maintained at all times.
 - Teachers play an important role in proper equipment hygiene. In the classes in which students wipe down/clean their own equipment, teachers should demonstrate how to properly wipe down/clean equipment, reinforce the importance of this practice, and supervise cleaning to ensure it is done correctly.
 - Post signage in all areas with shared equipment reminding students to wipe it down/clean it before and after use.
- **Additionally, shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily** as part of building cleaning schedules. Frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handles, buttons) should be cleaned multiple times a day.^{5 6}

Specific guidance by type of course

Chorus and singing instruction

Singing carries a relatively higher risk of virus transmission because voice projection generates respiratory droplets.⁷ Chorus and singing must use the guidance for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2.

- Consider what mask types may be most comfortable for singing and whether these masks can be provided to students.⁸
- When outdoors, staff should monitor student volume to prevent harm to students' vocal cords.
- Consider pursuing musical pieces that are at a lower volume. The lower the volume, the less projection required. Consider, also, the volume of any background music. The higher the volume of background music, the more vocalists will need to project to be heard.
- All students should face in one direction instead of facing one another. Avoid singing in a circle or semicircular formation.
- Students and teachers should avoid sharing materials (e.g., music stands) when feasible. Any sharing of equipment should follow the equipment sharing guidelines on page 3.
- When it is not possible to continue with singing instruction based on the guidelines on page 2 – for instance, when activities cannot be held outdoors due to inclement weather or in colder seasons – courses could focus on other aspects of music instruction, such as history of music, music theory, or vocal anatomy. These courses could also be conducted virtually.⁹

Theater

Singing and voice projection, both common in theater, carry a relatively higher risk of virus transmission.¹⁰ Musical and non-musical theater courses and activities must use the above guidelines for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2.

- Intentionally select artistic works that may facilitate reduced in-person interaction, such as those that involve smaller casts or that are easily rehearsed outdoors.¹¹ As one example, Concord Theatricals has created a [list of such works](#).¹²
- Avoid sharing equipment as feasible. Any sharing of equipment, including props, set pieces, rails, and voice amplification equipment, should follow the equipment sharing guidelines on page 3. Do not share makeup or anything that comes into close contact with mouth or eyes (e.g., microphones). Avoid sharing costumes and wigs.¹³
- Any rental equipment should be thoroughly disinfected upon receipt and before returning and regularly cleaned and disinfected, as with other equipment.

Band and the use of musical instruments

As is the case for chorus and singing, some musical instruments carry a relatively higher risk of virus transmission. Instruction for brass and woodwind instruments must follow the guidelines for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2.

- As noted earlier, instruction for musical instruments that require air blowing (e.g., flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, trombone) can only occur outdoors when individuals are at least 10 feet apart. These instruments should never be shared.
- Instruction for musical instruments that do not involve air blowing (e.g., strings, percussion, piano) may continue indoors or outdoors as long as health and safety requirements are met. If needed, these instruments can be shared between students in accordance with the above guidance on shared equipment on page 3.
- Students should be encouraged to clean their instruments regularly, especially the mouthpiece and high-touch surfaces, such as finger pads.
- For cleaning guidelines specific to each instrument, the National Federation of State High School Associations, the National Association for Music Education, and the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation have published [COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines](#).

Dance

While dance does not typically involve vocalization, it is a physically intense activity, similar to physical education, and can result in an increased risk of transmission due to increased respiration. Dance courses and activities must use the guidelines for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2. In addition:

- Prioritize forms of dance that allow for adequate distancing;¹⁴ dances reliant on close-proximity partners must be adapted to maintain physical distancing requirements.
- All sharing of equipment should follow the shared equipment guidance on page 3.
- Keep music at a volume that minimizes the need for the instructor to project their voice.

Physical education

This section contains guidance for physical education classes during the school day. With physical activity, individuals tend to breathe more heavily and speak louder, which increases the potential for dispersal of respiratory droplets. Physical education classes should follow the guidance for courses that require enhanced health and safety measures on page 2 and equipment sharing on page 3 and follow these guidelines:

- No physical education classes can have activities with close physical contact.
- Physical education should prioritize activities that do not require shared equipment. For example, consider agility training exercises, bodyweight strength training (such as push-ups), yoga, track and field, running, step aerobics, or racquet activities (as long as racquets are disinfected before and after use).
- Prioritize outdoor activities, whenever possible.

- Students should wash or sanitize hands before and after physical education. Particular attention should be paid to washing and sanitizing hands before and after masks are removed and put on, if applicable.
- No sharing of water bottles, towels, mouth guards, helmets or other equipment that comes into contact with the nose or mouth is allowed.
- If feasible, close communal areas, including athletic locker rooms. If not feasible, stagger locker assignments and access such that students who need to use lockers at the same time (e.g., those in the same physical education class) will be able to maintain physical distancing. Athletic locker rooms should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily.
- As part of the school cleaning/disinfecting protocols, frequently clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces (e.g., any equipment used) between uses and at least daily.

Visual arts

Visual arts courses and activities may involve the sharing of specialized equipment among students, such as paint brushes, paints, and cameras. Visual arts courses and activities must follow the guidance on equipment sharing on page 3.

Additional suggestions for visual arts courses and activities include:

- Pay particular attention to adding disposable protective covers to shared cameras and any other equipment that requires close eye or mouth contact.
- Adapt curricula when feasible to avoid expensive equipment (such as printers) that students need to share.
- Prioritize activities that require minimal supplies, such as sculpting clay, or create individual art kits with assigned supplies (e.g., colored pencils, markers) to use for the semester.
- Emphasize any elements of courses that could involve outdoor time such as drawing outdoors or nature photography.
- Change the focus of activities to avoid shared equipment use (e.g., switching a visual art class from screen printing to a focus on charcoal drawings where individual supplies can be used each class).
- Assign small student groups, e.g. create cohorts, at the beginning of the semester for visual arts courses which last for the entire semester. For example, consider assigning one student per camera to a photography assignment, with other students studying a famous photographer for one unit, and then switch these groups of students for the next unit.

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- ¹ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ² Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ³ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ⁴ CDC, [Considerations for Schools](#). (2020, May 19).
 - ⁵ CDC, [Considerations for Schools](#). (2020, May 19).
 - ⁶ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ⁷ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ⁸ Consider masks such as those available here: <https://www.broadwayreliefproject.com/singersmask>
 - ⁹ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ¹⁰ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ¹¹ Harvard School of Public Health, [Schools For Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). (2020, June).
 - ¹² Concord Theatricals, [Innovative and Flexible Show Selection for the 2020-21 School Year](#). (2020, June).
 - ¹³ Educational Theater Association, [Recommendations for Reopening School Theatre Programs](#). (2020, June).
 - ¹⁴ Dance USA, [Return to Dancing and Training Considerations Due to COVID-19](#). (2020).



Remote Learning Guidance for Fall 2020

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

July 24, 2020



Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#) (*download*) outlines requirements and considerations for fall reopening plans with the **goal of safely returning as many students as possible to in-person school settings to maximize learning and address students' holistic needs**. The Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance requires districts and schools to prepare a plan that includes three learning models: in-person learning with safety requirements, a hybrid model of in-person and remote learning, and a plan for full-time remote learning. Remote learning will be necessary for students who will not be attending school in-person, as part of a hybrid learning model, and in case changing COVID-19 conditions require a shift to full remote learning as determined by local and state leaders. The following guidance provides additional detail on remote learning expectations, program models districts may consider, and considerations for implementing various models.

In this document, you will find:

- **Important information about policy requirements and related guidance for remote learning** this fall,
- Criteria for meeting **foundational technology needs**, and
- Conditions and considerations for **selecting an appropriate remote learning option for your school or district**.

For more information or assistance, please contact Jackie Gantzer, director of remote learning, at jacquelyn.m.gantzer@mass.gov or 781-338-3519.

While this document will outline important differences in our expectations for remote learning this fall as compared to spring 2020, remote learning plans should continue to adhere to the guiding principles in the April 2020 [“Strengthening the Remote Learning Experience”](#) (*download*) guidance:

- **The safety and well-being of students, families, and staff has been and must continue to be our top priority as an educational community**. We are focused not only on physical health, safety, and nutrition, but also on [social-emotional](#) and mental health needs.
- This crisis disproportionately affects our most vulnerable students in terms of their physical and mental health and academically. **Equity needs to be a top consideration in local planning efforts**. To support these efforts, DESE has issued guidance on how best to support special populations, including [students with disabilities](#) (*download*) and [English learners](#).
- **Maintaining connections between school staff, students, and families is paramount, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our school communities**. These connections will help guide districts and schools in addressing students' specific needs.

In addition, **we as an education community must commit to a growth mindset in order to effectively navigate these unprecedented times**. Everyone – leaders, educators, students, and families – is managing competing priorities, navigating new experiences, learning new skills, and dealing with the uncertainty of an ongoing health pandemic. We must make the best decisions we can with the information we have, implement those decisions to the best of our ability, continuously gather feedback on what is or is not working, and adjust.

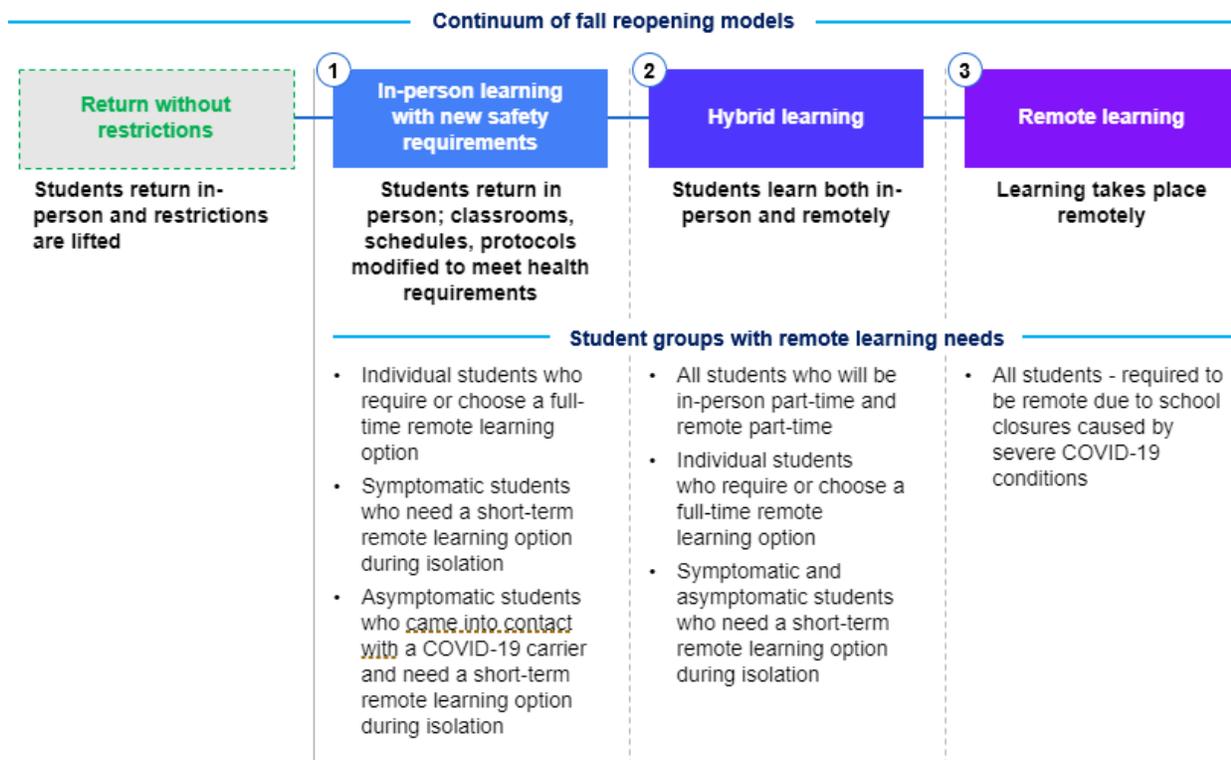
In particular, we **emphasize a commitment to equity during this challenging time**. The coronavirus has disproportionately impacted vulnerable students and their families, and we must continue to take action to ensure that **all** students, including our highest-need students have the access, resources, and high-quality instruction they deserve.

One plan with three learning models

Given the variety of student, family, teacher, and staff needs, as well as the potential for changing health circumstances, we are requiring districts and schools to prepare a reopening plan that includes the three learning models: in-person learning with new safety requirements, a hybrid of in-person and remote learning, and a comprehensive fully-remote learning program.

Regardless of the pandemic’s status this fall, planning for remote learning is necessary to ensure preparedness for changing circumstances and to address the needs of students impacted by each scenario (Exhibit 1, below).

Exhibit 1



To support districts in creating and implementing remote learning plans, DESE is partnering with LearnLaunch for the 2020-21 school year. This partnership will provide workshops, coaching, and resources for Massachusetts district and school leaders – free of charge – on the [Building Blocks of Equitable Remote Learning](#) framework. Districts interested in accessing this resource can visit the [LearnLaunch website](#) for more information or reach out directly to Jackie Gantzer (contact information above).

Requirements and related guidance for remote learning this fall

On June 30, 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted, on an emergency basis, amendments to the student learning time regulations, 603 CMR 27.00. In particular, the amendments include 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), which requires all remote learning models to meet the following standards:

- Procedures for all students to participate in remote learning, including a system for tracking attendance and participation;
- Remote academic work is aligned to state standards; and
- A policy for issuing grades for students' remote academic work.
- Teachers and administrators shall regularly communicate with students' parents and guardians, including providing interpretation and translation services to limited English proficient parents and guardians.

Structured Learning Time

Remote learning this spring took place during school closures ordered by the Governor, and districts were not required to fully meet the student learning time requirements. **This will change for the fall. Districts will be required to meet the structured learning time requirements, whether they are providing instruction in-person, remotely, or in a hybrid model.**

While these requirements may be modified in the future, at this time, regardless of the learning model (in-person, hybrid, or remote), the minimum school year is 180 days, and students must receive a minimum of 900 and 990 hours of structured learning time for elementary and secondary students, respectively.

Remote learning constitutes structured learning time so long as a district's remote learning model is consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b) outlined above. Structured learning time is defined in the regulations as "time during which students are engaged in regularly scheduled instruction, learning activities, or learning assessments within the curriculum for study of the 'core subjects' and 'other subjects.'" In addition to classroom time where both teachers and students are present, structured learning time may include directed study, independent study, technology-assisted learning, presentations by persons other than teachers, school-to-work programs, and statewide student performance assessments." **All the activities listed in this definition may be incorporated in or adapted to hybrid and remote learning programs, and we encourage districts to incorporate learning time activities that are both computer-based and non-computer-based.**

As with in-person programming, some activities that may occur during the school day, while organized by a teacher or school staff member, do not constitute structured learning time. Unless directly incorporated into standards-based instructional time, the following activities do not meet the criteria described above and do not count toward meeting the minimum structured learning time requirement: recess, social or informal check-ins, non-instructional games, unstructured study periods, and participating in optional school programming (such as social clubs).

Prioritizing Students for In-Person Learning

In cases where districts cannot bring all students back in-person and are implementing either a predominantly hybrid or remote model, they may choose to identify groups of students to attend school in-person full-time – so long as the district is able to effectively follow health and safety requirements. Some students have a particularly high need for in-person instruction in order to progress adequately in their learning. **For this reason, we encourage districts to prioritize the following student groups for full-time in-person instruction:**

1. Students with disabilities and English learners, particularly those with more intensive needs;
2. Students whose parents/caregivers report that they do not have access to reliable internet or a suitable learning space at home (particularly students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity and students in foster care or congregate care);
3. Students who are significantly behind academically;
4. Students who were disengaged and/or who struggled significantly during previous remote learning periods; and
5. Early learners (grades PK-5).

In cases where the student populations listed above comprise too large a group to safely return all of the prioritized students in person, we strongly encourage districts to prioritize students in the first two groups for in-person instruction.

Even if a student is prioritized for in-person learning, **parents/caregivers have the option to choose a district’s remote learning program for their child’s instruction if they prefer – with the understanding that the remote learning program may not provide as robust offerings as, or replace the full benefits of, learning in person.** At no point should schools or districts “counsel” students into a particular program due to behavior challenges.

Enrollment

Schools and districts should continue to report the enrollment status of all students via SIMS (Student Information Management System) in accordance with [normal procedures](#), including those attending in person and remotely.

Many superintendents have surveyed parents/caregivers about their intention to have their children return to school. We recommend that districts and parents/caregivers continue to be in close communication so that schools can plan for staffing and programming thoughtfully. If a district is able to provide in-person programming and a student is physically able to attend, at this time, DESE recommends starting with in-person learning. However, **parents/caregivers who do not want their child(ren) to return in person may choose a district’s remote learning program.**

In addition, parents/caregivers should keep students home from school if they are sick or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, and districts and schools are required to provide a learning program to students in all of these scenarios, though specific remote learning programming will depend on individual districts and schools.

There may be circumstances in which, after deciding that their children should start the school year learning remotely, parents decide they would like their children to attend school in person. However, there will likely be health and safety considerations that require planning (such as maintaining appropriate distancing in the classroom), and as such, parents/caregivers should anticipate a reasonable waiting period before students are able to change from remote to in-person learning. **If necessary to comply with health and safety requirements, districts may establish a policy that sets a reasonable transition period, ideally no more than three to four weeks, to plan for the transition of a student from remote to in-person learning.** During this time period, teaching and learning must continue uninterrupted for that student.

Attendance

Schools and districts must take daily attendance whether a student is in person or remote. Consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), districts must have a daily attendance policy and system for remote learning that can be reported into SIMS. Schools may employ multiple ways to track attendance (e.g., monitor whether students are present in synchronous sessions, submitting assignments online, logging onto online learning platforms, attending virtual check-ins, etc.) depending on the structure of the remote learning program. It is critical that districts clearly communicate this policy to students, families, and staff to ensure attendance reporting accuracy.

During the 2020-21 school year, DESE will also require schools and districts to differentiate between students attending school in-person and remotely in their local Student Information System. This data will allow DESE to monitor remote learning programming and student engagement across the Commonwealth. The Department will release information soon with directions for districts to report this information.

Parents/caregivers are responsible for ensuring their child attends school every day, whether for in-person or remote learning. Schools and districts must continue to investigate extended absences and make and document reasonable efforts to locate the student and determine the reason for nonattendance. In addition to attendance officers, schools may identify staff members who are unable to return to school in person who could support more robust efforts to follow-up with absent students. Districts and schools are especially encouraged during this time to work directly with families to identify barriers to student attendance and to support families in alleviating these challenges. Specifically, we encourage districts to create formal support plans for students and families experiencing challenges. Additional guidance, information, and resources for communicating with and engaging students and families can be found on DESE's [Social and Emotional Learning](#) page.

Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

Districts may determine the amount of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning during remote learning programming. However, consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), DESE requires that **remote learning programs include regular, two-way communication between students, educators, and families to ensure students and families have meaningful opportunities to connect regularly with staff.** Students must have regular, consistent opportunities to access live, synchronous instruction, student-to-student interaction, collaborative assignments/projects, teacher feedback, and other needed supports (e.g., semi-weekly office hours, individual check-ins with students bi-weekly, etc.), as they are critical for student academic growth and meaningful student and family engagement.

Grades

Consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), **districts must assess all students based on the district’s and educator’s performance criteria for students during the 2020-21 academic year.** This performance criteria must be consistent across in-person, hybrid, and remote learning environments. For example, if students typically receive a letter grade (A-F) for a particular course, students who are participating remotely must also receive a letter grade. Although a district’s grading policy will be implemented across all scenarios, districts should consider exemptions for students under extreme circumstances (e.g., students in households with family members experiencing significant health issues related to COVID-19) and ensure they receive the appropriate support and wraparound services to accelerate learning.

Learning Standards

Consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), **all students – whether learning in-person or remotely – must have access to grade-level instruction in all content areas included in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.** While the scope and sequence of the instruction teachers provide will vary depending on student needs and district requirements, all students will be required to take the MCAS tests in spring 2021. Students learning remotely should also have opportunities to engage in enrichment opportunities and receive intervention supports as needed.

Special Education in Remote Settings

All schools and districts are required to have a [comprehensive plan](#) (download) for delivering special education instruction and services remotely. A remote model must be available for individual students who are not returning in person, as well as for students attending in person in the event of future classroom or school closures due to COVID-19.

During the spring of 2020, DESE described two models of service delivery that could be used to satisfy the requirement to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities:

- **Resources and Supports:** (e.g., sending packets and assignments home coupled with frequent communication with parents) and
- **Instruction and Services:** (e.g., structured learning time, teletherapy, and video conferencing).

With the ability to plan for the possibility of remote service delivery during the 2020-21 school year, schools and districts must be prepared to provide services through the “Instruction and Services” mode of delivery. The “Resources and Supports” delivery model can only be used on a temporary basis for a limited period of time (no more than two weeks), until the school or district has overcome any hurdles that prevented service delivery through an “Instruction and Services” model.

For school year 2020-21, Instruction and Services must include the following components:

- A regular and consistent schedule of classes, interventions, services, and therapies as required by the student’s IEP, offered synchronously or asynchronously;
- Structured learning time designed so that the student can access state standards; and
- Frequent interactions with teachers and other staff members to ensure participation.

The consistent schedule of classes, interventions, services, and therapies must include time students spend interacting directly with teachers and related service providers on a regular basis, as well as some independent work time, as appropriate, and opportunities for interacting with classmates. Synchronous remote lessons or tele-therapy sessions can be provided via telephone or video conferencing. Students might also benefit from asynchronous pre-recorded videos of lessons to follow at home. For students receiving the majority of their daily instruction through special education, teachers and therapists should assign supplemental work (beyond lessons taught synchronously or asynchronously) during the school day that can be accomplished independently with guidance from and accountability to the teacher or therapist.

English as Second Language (ESL) in Remote Settings

Districts and schools must continue to meet their legal obligation to serve English learners, even when students are learning remotely. **All schools and districts must have a comprehensive plan for delivering English Learner Education (ELE) services remotely**, and this model must be available for individual students who are not returning in person and for all students in the event of future classroom or school closures due to COVID-19. Districts can find additional recommendations and resources in [DESE's Guidance on Remote Learning for English Learners](#).

To improve English learners' educational opportunities, educators and families should work as partners. Without opportunities to interact in person, it is even more important to build and maintain strong relationships. The Department provided additional [guidelines](#) with tools and resources for students who are English learners and for the educators and families who are supporting their learning.

Foundational technology needs for remote learning

In order to prepare for the full range of possible learning environments during the 2020-21 school year, districts must ensure that every student has adequate access to technology to engage in remote learning. Further, districts should confirm that staff members have what they need to effectively teach while they are remote and/or to reach students who are learning remotely. To support these efforts, districts should include the following in remote learning plans:

Access and connectivity for every student and educator

Districts should ensure that every individual student and educator has access to an appropriate device (such as a laptop, Chromebook, or tablet) and adequate internet (such as through household broadband or a wireless hotspot) to use for remote learning. Districts are encouraged to use multiple funding sources to ensure full access to technology in the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. Districts should consider allocating funding from the following [grants](#) made available to cities, towns, and districts:

- \$25 million from the Remote Learning Technology Essentials grants, which will be distributed to districts to help close gaps in student access to devices and the internet;
- \$193.8 million from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, issued to districts largely based on the Title I formula;
- A portion of the \$502 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CvRF) already allocated to cities and towns, of which a meaningful amount of submitted costs are related to education; and
- \$182 million from the CvRF School Reopening grants, through which districts will receive \$225 per pupil to support school reopening.

Uniform digital learning platforms

According to DESE's spring technology survey, the majority of Massachusetts districts currently have some form of a learning management system (LMS), though some may need to add supplemental platforms and programs to support full delivery of remote instruction. For the 2020-21 school year, districts should work closely with educators, students, and families to select and implement technology platforms and promote safe and effective use throughout the year. We expect districts to include the types of technology platforms listed below or their equivalent as part of their remote learning plan.¹

- **Learning Management System (LMS) platform** (*for schools without an LMS*): Select and license an LMS platform that will enable self-directed study and allow teachers to assign and receive work, track progress, and provide targeted feedback and support. (Google Classroom, Canvas, and Schoology are three of the most widely learning management system platforms used in Massachusetts districts).
- **Collaboration tools:** Identify and select common collaboration tools for staff and students and purchase enterprise licenses if selected technologies are not open-use. Ensure all stakeholders are using compatible software for activities such as:
 - Face-to-face communication (e.g. Google Meet, Skype, Zoom)
 - Instant messaging (e.g. Slack, Skype)
 - Document collaboration (e.g. Google Documents, Microsoft Office 365)
 - File-sharing (e.g. Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, Office 365)
 - Calendar-sharing (e.g. Google Calendar, iCalendar, Microsoft Outlook)
- **Content platform(s):** For asynchronous and supplemental learning materials, identify common content platforms (such as Khan Academy) that educators use for direct and/or supplemental instruction (e.g. readings, videos, tutorials, and games) and that can be integrated with the district learning management system.
- **Single-sign on platform:** Incorporate a platform that provides a single-sign on access point for students and families to make accessing remote learning as simple as possible. Common platforms used in Massachusetts include Clever and ClassLink.

Training and support for students, families, and staff members

Districts should set expectations for account setup and user testing on new platforms, disseminate user guides and online resources, and offer technical support resources and training, if needed. Districts and schools should provide streamlined, consistent communication and support to enable all students, parents/caregivers, and/or educators to do the following:

- Log on to their device and use technology tools and platforms safely and effectively
- Access ongoing technology support (both for hardware and network issues)
- Access curriculum and content
- Assign and/or complete and submit assignments and receive feedback
- Monitor course progress and student performance (such as grades and assessment results)
- Engage with their teacher(s) for instruction and interact with other students
- Access services and accommodations for students with disabilities
- Access services for English learners

School and district technology systems

Each district and school should name a technology lead to create, implement, and monitor technology systems throughout the year. We recommend that each technology lead, in collaboration with other school staff members and stakeholders, manage the following systems:

- **Device management:** Monitor inventory, distribution, and maintenance
- **Security compliance:** Ensure all technology platforms and tools comply with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Districts are strongly encouraged to join the [Student Data Privacy Alliance](#) for additional resources and ongoing support.
- **Technology support:** Identify and/or provide ongoing technical support for educators, students, and parents/caregivers. Districts are encouraged to join the [Massachusetts Technology Directors Listserv](#) to collaborate with other technology leads across the Commonwealth.
- **Progress monitoring:** Develop mechanisms to collect and integrate feedback on the learning platforms (e.g. administer a regular survey, hold focus groups), and facilitate sharing of best practices across staff (e.g. start a living document of tips and tricks, hold peer tech support sessions).

Options for remote learning programs

In this section, we outline several remote learning options that are available to districts and schools this fall. When determining which option(s) to pursue, districts should consider the following conditions to identify the option(s) that best align with the district’s resources and needs:

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** How does the remote learning model fit within the district’s broader plan for 2020-21 (including in-person and/or hybrid plans)? How many students will need access to a full-time remote program?
- **Planning and implementation:** How will the district secure enough resources and capacity to plan and implement the necessary remote learning program?
- **Staffing:** How many staff members are available to teach remotely? How prepared are they to teach in a remote setting? What kind of support do they need?
- **Curriculum and instructional materials:** Does the district have high-quality, adaptable instructional materials that can be used in a remote setting?
- **Options and cost/benefits analysis:** What are the options within and between remote learning programs, and what are the costs and benefits?

The following pages include charts that summarize five options for remote learning programs, which districts might benefit most from each, and what some of the high-level benefits and challenges are for each. These models are not mutually exclusive, and different models may be used for different groups of students to meet varying needs. **In every model, districts and schools are ultimately responsible for the overall student learning experience so that all students are appropriately engaged, making academic progress, and have the resources and support they need throughout the year.**

Option 1: Operate a fully district-designed and district-run remote program.

Districts may build upon systems and experiences from the spring to operate a full-time remote program for students. Districts would need to provide all technology (including a learning management system and content platforms), technology support, instructional and operational staffing, curriculum, and related professional development. District teachers and staff would be responsible for delivering instruction aligned to state standards, providing feedback (including grades) to students, monitoring attendance and engagement, communicating with students and families, etc. This option, while requiring a significant investment of district resources and capacity, may provide strong alignment between students attending school remotely, in person, and in hybrid settings. If districts are considering building a remote/virtual program that can be sustained in future years and beyond COVID-19-related needs, they may consider applying to develop and operate a District Virtual School. The Department’s [guidance for District Virtual Schools](#) provides helpful information and resources for districts seeking to implement this option for both the short- and long-term.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Program should be designed to fully align to current academic programs and remote learning needs in a way that allows for seamless transitions between in-person, hybrid, and remote settings.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires full school-based staffing models to run all areas of the program, and staff members will need to be trained on all areas of effective remote/virtual instruction.
- **Cost:** Dependent on existing district infrastructure and details of local remote program, though generally there are “start-up” costs for areas like technology and training that, once fully operational, more closely compares to in-person costs per student.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts with sufficient staffing available to deliver remote instruction for all grade levels and content areas needed • Districts with high-quality, adaptable curriculum and strong technology infrastructure • Districts that experienced fewer challenges adapting to remote learning in the spring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully aligned to district academic program (learning priorities, curriculum, scope and sequence, etc.) • Lends itself to moving between in-person, hybrid, and remote more seamlessly • May be used in subsequent years regardless of the status of the virus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant capacity in terms of planning, staffing, and implementing

Option 2: Adopt and implement a high-quality curriculum that easily spans in-person and remote settings.

Adopting high-quality curriculum and instructional materials can be a powerful way to accelerate student learning. Given the various learning environments districts are planning for, this may also be an opportunity for districts to select curricular materials that are designed to be used across in-person, hybrid, and remote settings. The Department recently applied to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for grant funding to procure high-quality, comprehensive instructional materials that would be made available to districts. Instructional materials would be available for grades K-8 in ELA and math, designed for teaching in-person or remotely, and would be paired with training and coaching. The U.S. Department of Education expects to notify DESE in late-July whether or not funding is available for this option.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Students should access the same high-quality content and instruction regardless of whether they are using a remote, in-person, or hybrid model.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires full school-based staffing models to run all areas of the program. Staff members are recommended to participate in training to adopt and effectively implement the new instructional materials.
- **Cost:** Funding will vary based on curriculum options; DESE may provide funding to support these costs.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts with sufficient staffing available to deliver remote instruction for all grade levels and content areas needed • Districts with strong technology infrastructure • Districts with an appetite to adopt and train on a new set of instructional materials • Districts anticipating many students moving between in-person, hybrid, and/or remote programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials that can be adapted to use for in-person, hybrid, and remote settings • Educators receive professional development on instructional delivery in remote, hybrid, and in-person settings • Creates a coherent learning program for all students, with certain curricula providing demonstrated gains for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant staff capacity to adopt a new set of instructional materials and to dedicate time for training • Additional costs associated with purchasing and implementing a new curriculum

Option 3: Combine pre-existing instructional materials with online virtual teaching materials.

The Department will curate recommendations for virtual content/instructional materials that educators can use for direct and supplemental remote instruction. The Department will provide a sample schedule for elementary, middle school, and high school students that includes recommended virtual content available for core subject areas. Districts and schools can select and incorporate the virtual content that builds on their current curriculum and instructional materials and that meets their specific needs.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Content should be tailored to the specific needs of the district’s plan – as primary content for remote learning only or to supplement remote, hybrid, and/or in-person instruction.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires district educators to plan and deliver all remote instruction. Relieves some instructor planning and instructional time by providing vetted content resources, though educators would still need to assign individual activities and lessons to students based on district scope and sequence and student need.
- **Cost:** May require optional licenses for specific high-quality content and platforms (cost varies by source).

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts with sufficient staffing available to deliver remote instruction for all grade levels and content areas needed and educators who are able to navigate technology platforms fairly well • Districts that would benefit from supplementing remote learning plans with vetted virtual content • Districts with a small percentage of students needing or choosing full-time remote instruction and/or districts leaning towards a predominantly hybrid model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators have the ability to supplement instruction with vetted content as needed • Educators can spend more time planning for and providing individual student support instead of planning and delivering all instructional content • Can be designed to be coherent with in-person and hybrid models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires capacity for schools/ educators to select and assign appropriate content and navigate multiple content platforms

Option 4: Purchase courses through Commonwealth Virtual Schools (CMVS).

Commonwealth Virtual Schools (CMVS) can provide individual courses or a full bundle of courses to schools or districts through an agreement that allows the student to remain enrolled in their home district. These courses must meet the district’s or school’s standards and requirements. The CMVS provides the teacher, the learning management system/curriculum platform, the courses, synchronous or asynchronous content, assignments, and assessments. Districts would assign educators and/or other staff members to monitor student progress and provide additional supports.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Serves best as a stand-alone program for a small percentage of students who require remote-only programming. Does not lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and/or remote settings.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires assigning teachers/staff to monitor and facilitate student progress, but no direct instruction for core content.
- **Cost:** Around \$350-\$575 per student per semester-long course. Districts may also purchase course “bundles” for students to cover all required courses for a semester or a full year.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts with staffing concerns (number available and prepared for remote instruction) • Districts that experienced many challenges with remote learning in the spring • Districts with a small percentage of students needing or choosing full-time remote instruction • Districts with specific gaps in remote instructional offerings that individual courses could fill effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students access a single or full suite of grade-level, semester-long courses that include a learning management system, content, and synchronous and asynchronous instruction with a Massachusetts-certified teacher • Can fill gaps in courses/subjects, particularly in the secondary grades • Requires minimal district planning and staffing resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires an additional cost per student • Curriculum may not be aligned with district’s existing curriculum; doesn’t lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and remote learning throughout the semester • Districts would need a separate plan if all students went remote • Districts will have to establish a purchasing agreement with one of two CMVS; limited spaces available

Option 5: Purchase student licenses for a Learning Management System (LMS) with full course content included.

While districts may purchase licenses from a virtual course and content provider at any time, DESE is exploring partnerships with vendors that could provide a stand-alone, self-paced LMS populated with full K-12 content that can be used by students to cover the basic curriculum standards on a largely asynchronous basis. While this platform would not depend on frequent synchronous live teaching, it would require assigned and targeted educator check-in/coaching support from the district/school and would benefit from added synchronous instructional opportunities. The LMS partner sought by DESE would provide all technical support for districts and families that opt-in. The LMS partner would also provide professional development to districts on how to deploy the system (potentially embedded as part of the per-pupil buy-in cost).

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Serves best as a stand-alone program for a small or large percentage of students who are interested in a remote learning option for a longer period of time. Does not lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and/or remote settings unless the district decides to adopt the LMS-provided curriculum for all students.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires assigning teachers/staff (e.g. educators who must work remotely) to monitor and facilitate student progress, provide additional support, and possibly to provide tutoring or other live, synchronous opportunities.
- **Cost:** Initial research shows it could range from \$200-\$400 annually per student for access to a full suite of courses.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts with staffing concerns (concerned about the number of staff available and prepared for remote instruction) • Districts with limited technology and system infrastructure to create and oversee a fully remote program • Districts with individual students/families who are interested in a fully remote option for a longer period of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students access a full suite of courses that include an LMS and instructional content that is largely self-directed and asynchronous. • Supplements district staffing with additional resources • Allows for easier collaboration and sharing of resources across school and district boundaries (e.g., grouping students at the same grade level and/or sharing teachers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires an additional cost per student • Depending on the number and configuration of participating students, the district may need to creatively assign educators to student groups, such as assigning an educator to support multiple grade levels and/or students across multiple schools. • Curriculum is not aligned with district curriculum and doesn't easily lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and remote throughout the year (unless the district adopts the LMS curriculum for all students).

Next steps for planning and implementation

As districts identify how they will deliver remote learning for the 2020-21 school year, they will need to work closely with students, families, and educators to ensure their implementation plan takes into consideration the needs of all participating students.

LearnLaunch has provided a [framework](#) to help districts plan and implement comprehensive remote learning plans, regardless of the specific model adopted. Below is a set of planning considerations and next steps aligned to this framework. Districts should visit the LearnLaunch [website](#) for helpful tools and information about upcoming workshops, or reach out to Jackie Gantzer, director of remote learning, at jacquelyn.m.gantzer@mass.gov or 781-338-3519.

1. Prepare for the 2020-21 school year

Set Priorities for Learning

- Determine the academic vision for the 2020-21 school year and how it will be implemented in remote learning settings.
- Plan learning experiences, including content, instruction, and progress monitoring.

Select Aligned Tools

- Ensure all curriculum and instructional materials are high quality and integrated with the district Student Information Systems and other technology platforms, where possible.
- See the “Uniform Digital Learning Platforms” section above for additional detail.

Ensure Equitable Access

- See the “Foundational Technology Needs” section above for additional detail on technology requirements.
- Ensure students, staff, and families know how to effectively access and use all content and technology platforms selected.
- Assist participating families in getting the resources they need to effectively support and monitor student learning

2. Onboard staff, students, and families

Communicate Clearly

- Create weekly consolidated communications to students and parents/caregivers, including meeting times and assignment checklists.
- Establish regular two-way communication with students, staff, and families to monitor program effectiveness and adjust support strategies where needed.
- Develop communication plans and strategies that are culturally responsive and accessible, including providing translation services.

Prepare Educators

- Work closely with educators to collectively plan and problem-solve and to understand their experiences and challenges.
- Assign teachers/staff to provide necessary instructional and support roles.
- Provide job-embedded professional development for specific staffing assignments.

Support Parents

- Create opportunities to regularly communicate with parents/caregivers in ways that are accessible and culturally responsive. These opportunities should give staff an opportunity to understand parents'/caregivers' experiences and challenges.
- Connect parents/caregivers to technical support and resources related to student learning.
- Provide explicit expectations for parent/caregiver responsibilities and offer ongoing resources and support for implementing and monitoring student learning at home.

3. Ensure program delivery is inclusive and holistic

Include Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

- Prioritize building relationships and a sense of community.
- Provide resources, instructional time, and gather feedback to promote student and teacher well-being.
- Incorporate trauma-informed practices as part of regular instruction and student support.

Engage Learners

- Provide variation in mode of instruction, including enrichment, experiential learning, real-time feedback, and project-based learning.
- Allow for student voice and choice and provide opportunities to build students' capacity for self-directed learning.
- Create a standard action plan to identify and support students not effectively engaged in remote learning.

Plan for Special Education

- Ensure students with disabilities receive all necessary supports and services through district staff and/or external providers.
- Ensure all instructional materials and content are accessible to students with disabilities and/or that staff members provide appropriate accommodations for students where necessary.
- Reference DESE [guidance on special education](#).

Address Needs of English Learners

- Ensure English learners receive all necessary supports and services through district staff and/or external providers.
- Incorporate programs and content specifically designed for English learners.
- Reference DESE [guidance on English learners](#).

¹ *Disclaimer: This section includes tools and resources for districts and educators who are supporting remote learning. The Department is providing this information as a service. The tools and resources listed do not represent an endorsement or recommendation by DESE of any instructional resource, product, or eLearning system.*