STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DURING REMOTE LEARNING

Introduction

With extended school closures and the transition to remote learning, teachers are working to adapt their instructional strategies and lessons to sustain student learning. **Maintaining high levels of student engagement is both a priority area and challenge for teachers in this new online learning environment**. Teachers must contend with varying levels of student access to technology at home as well as their own learning curve and comfort with various online platforms and adjusted pedagogies.

The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching highlight the importance of student engagement, one of its eight quality standards, and provides broad goals for supporting student engagement in an online environment.[1]

National Standards for Quality Online Teaching: *Learner Engagement Standards*

The online teacher promotes learner success through interactions with learners and other stakeholders and by facilitating meaningful learner engagement in learning activities.

- Use digital tools to identify patterns in learner engagement and performance that will inform improvements to achieve individual learner growth.
- Engage learner agency.
- Enable a learner-customized pace and/or path through instruction aligned with learners' individual goals, learning trajectories, and interests.
- Establish relationships through timely and encouraging communication, using various formats.
- Help learners reach content mastery through instruction and quality feedback using various formats.
- Ensure that learners have necessary course resources and the information needed to navigate the learning platform and perform required tasks in a timely manner.
- Communicate frequently with stakeholders regarding learner progress and strategies for supporting learner engagement.
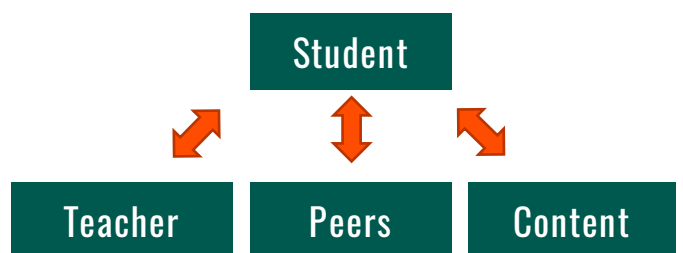

This document serves as a resource for teachers seeking to understand best practices and identify strategies for maintaining student engagement during remote learning.

Relationships Remain at the Core of Student Engagement

Characteristics of successful student engagement in an online learning setting reflect many of the best practices for student engagement in a traditional classroom. However, student engagement is perhaps even more critical for online learning as students and teachers can no longer rely on face-to-face interactions.[2] At the core, online learning student engagement strategies seek to sustain and build connections and relationships.[3]

Key Relationships that Support Online Engagement

Student engagement in online learning is driven by three types of interactions – student-teacher, student-student (peer), and student-content - visualized to the right. Teachers should consider and adapt each type of interaction for an online learning environment.[4] Resources and strategies for each area are provided in subsequent sections of this document. The final section presents considerations for engaging with students that lack consistent access to online content and technology at home.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The student-teacher relationship is at the core of classroom management in both in-person and remote learning environments.[5] Teachers benefit from strong existing student-teacher relationships prior to the shift to remote learning. Teachers can build on these existing relationships by adapting strategies to develop a virtual classroom culture that supports student engagement. Specific strategies include:

- Strong teacher presence and class culture
- Timely communication and feedback
- Clear expectations
- Consistent routines
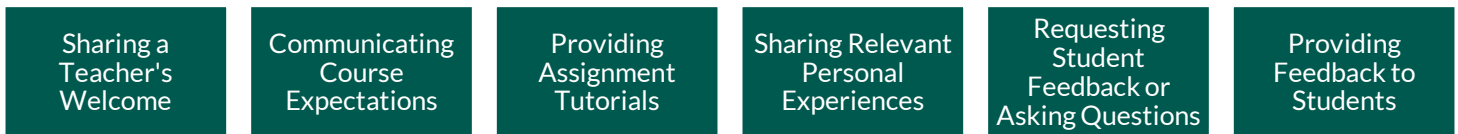- Social-emotional support

> **Multimedia Tools**
>
> There are many platforms and tools that allow users to develop creative products using audio-visual, graphics/visualization, and word processing applications. Sample tools include **Prezi**, **Animoto**, and **Google Docs**.

Many of these strategies are interrelated. For example, developing routines can in turn build social-emotional support for students by providing consistency during what may be a period of great transition and instability for many students. **If possible, teachers should prioritize creating their own video content or opportunities that allow for video conferencing**. Videos can be a powerful visual tool for building relationships and bonds between teacher and student. Teacher-created videos may be most effective for communicating the following kinds of information.[6]

Opportunities for Teacher-Created Video Content

| Sharing a Teacher's Welcome | Communicating Course Expectations | Providing Assignment Tutorials | Sharing Relevant Personal Experiences | Requesting Student Feedback or Asking Questions | Providing Feedback to Students |

Examples and resources for implementing strategies to support student-teacher relationships are provided in the table below.

Key Strategy Theme	Resource Description	Link
Tips for Creating Instructional Videos	The National Center on Accessible Education Materials' top ten tips for creating quality instructional videos to support learning.	→
Interactive Video Creation	Common Sense Education provides a list of applications and resources for creating interactive videos for online learning.	→
Supporting Students' Social-Emotional Needs	The Institute for Social Emotional Learning offers five tips for supporting both student and teacher social-emotional needs during the COVID-19 school closures. Specific strategies include ideas for student check-ins, journaling prompts, and breaks from instructional activities.	→
Building Strong Online Learning Habits	The Global Online Academy offers four habits of successful online learning communities: (1) be active, (2) be steady and reliable, (3) be resilient, and (4) be playful. This resource also includes specific examples and strategies to achieve these goals as well as links to additional resources, such as tips for designing effective video calls with students.	→
Remote Learning Routine Template	Two templates for remote learning schedules developed by teachers. Includes link to a video explaining rationale behind the schedule.	→
Remote School Routines and Procedures	Turnaround for Children provides a template and checklist for planning both home and remote school routines.	→
Planning for 1:1 Check-Ins	Turnaround for Children provides a resource for "Banking Time Virtually" with students. The template offers suggestions for how to manage and facilitate 1:1 check-ins with students as well as a schedule template.	→

Student-Peer Relationships

Teachers can facilitate peer interactions and collaboration as a way to promote student engagement in online learning.[7] Similar to the strategies described above, strong communication, structures, and routines can also sustain peer relationships by providing regular and meaningful opportunities to engage. Once these foundations are set, teachers can design online learning activities that require students to interact and collaborate with each other, which has been shown to promote student engagement.[8]

Online learning provides several opportunities for peer interaction. Teachers can promote collaboration by setting up online discussion boards where students can reflect on their learning and receive feedback from peers and teachers.[9] Participating in discussion boards ensures that students actively engage with course content rather than passively observing instruction.[10] Teachers should take care to provide support for effective collaboration, as ineffective collaboration in an online environment can increase frustration. Teachers should provide explicit instruction on both the social skills needed for effective collaboration in general and expectations for specific collaborative activities at the outset of the learning experiences.[11]

Collaboration and Communication Tools
Multiple apps and websites allow students to exchange questions and responses and share and edit files and documents with each other in real-time. Sample tools include **Google Hangouts**, **Join.me**, and **Skype**.

Collaborative activities may be particularly important for schools making unplanned transitions to online learning as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. According to the California Department of Education (CDE), collaborative work in small groups can help students maintain relationships with classmates during remote learning. The CDE recommends that teachers assign students to provide feedback on one another's work in small groups to support continuity and ensure equitable participation in learning activities.[12] Peer review strategies in which students review and provide feedback on one another's work helps ensure that students engage constructively with online learning assignments. Teachers should provide incentives, such as online tokens or points, to encourage students to provide peer feedback.[13]

Opportunities for Online Peer Interactions

Discussion Boards	Small Group Activities	Peer Feedback

Examples and resources for implementing strategies to support student-peer relationships are provided in the table below.

Key Strategy Theme	Resource Description	Link
Online Discussion Tools	Common Sense Education lists resources for facilitating online discussions among students.	→
Facilitating Online Discussions	Resource on strategies for facilitating effective online discussions, including a checklist of tips and example activities.	→
Adapting Collaboration for Online Learning	Think CERCA offers guidance on how to facilitate peer collaboration as well as guides for adapting think-pair-share, last/final word, and silent conversation collaboration strategies for online learning.	→
Discussion Board Strategies	Pearson Education offers tips to maximize student engagement in discussion boards.	→
Lesson Plan using Discussion Boards	Example lesson plan (Grade 5-12) from the International Literacy Association that utilizes online literature circles to engage students in discussion. Includes example handouts for students.	→

Student-Content Relationships

Students must be motivated to engage and persist in online learning. Teachers can increase motivation by connecting instruction to students' interests.[15] Teachers can also use the strategies listed in the figure to the right to monitor students' performance in online courses and provide motivation as needed.

The American Psychological Association (APA) recommends that teachers provide students with an age-appropriate degree of choice in learning activities to support motivation and develop self-regulation skills. Research finds that choice in learning activities develops intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy in students across grade levels.[16]

In addition to providing choice, the APA recommends the following strategies to support motivation in both online and in-person learning environments, many of which relate to the student-teacher relationship discussed previously:[17]

- Set clear performance standards from the start
- Help students develop a sense of ownership over the learning process
- Provide feedback to students
- Encourage students to assess their own learning progress

Personalized learning strategies also support student motivation and engagement with content. Many educational organizations and agencies have developed definitions of personalized learning. Typically, personalized learning involves some combination of flexible pacing, customizable supports, and student choice.[18] Teachers can use these principles of personalized learning to support content engagement in online settings.

Characteristics of Personalized Learning

Flexible Pacing	Customizable Supports	Student Choice

Examples and resources for implementing strategies to support student motivation and interest are provided in the table below.

Key Strategy Theme	Resource Description	Link
Setting Online Learning Goals	Article from Edgenuity on setting personalized learning goals for online learning.	→
Learning Playlists	Examples of using learning playlists to support differentiation in instruction, including many online learning activities.	→
Online Learning Choice Boards	Examples of choice boards and brief video on using digital choice boards.	→
Strategies for Building Engagement in Online Learning	Better Lesson provides a range of strategies and tips from instructional coaches for teachers seeking to develop engaging and effective online learning. While these strategies cover a range of areas, some relate directly to supporting content engagement specifically, including: goal-setting, flipped learning, and choice boards.	→

Considerations for Students without Internet Access

Approximately seven million K-12 students live in homes without Internet access.[19] While the digital divide is narrowing, districts and schools struggle to ensure equity in access to online learning during extended school closures. Larger-scale initiatives to boost internet access through hot spots and device distribution are underway in many areas. Additionally, some districts are using alternative media channels such as radio and TV to broadcast learning content to students at home. Districts are also distributing take-home packets to students with instructional materials and activities. These packets may be distributed through meal distribution sites, school buses, or at other no-contact pick-up sites. If students have access to a device but lack consistent Internet access at home, schools may provide wi-fi hot spot locations for students and their families to download content for offline or on-demand use at home.[20]

Alternative Options for Remote Learning

Use of Broadcast TV Content	Take-Home Packets	Offline Content and Activities	Asynchronous and On-Demand Options	Use of Cellphones to Connect

Examples and resources for connecting with students that lack consistent Internet access are provided in the table below.

Key Strategy Theme	Resource Description	Link
KSPS PBS TV Content	KSPS PBS is showing daily on-air instructional content from April 27 through June 12 from 7:00 am to 9:00 am and from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm (re-broadcast). This broadcast focuses on literacy and math for Grades K-5. The station also shows educational content for Grades 6-12 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Weekly program schedules and viewing guides are available online.	→
Offline Choice Boards	Article discussing the need to balance offline and online activities. Includes a template and example of an offline choice board.	→
Offline Remote Learning Activities	Ideas for remote learning activities that do not require the Internet. Organized into ten activity types with ideas and limitations for each.	→
Tips for Overcoming Limited Internet Access	KQED's tips and considerations for designing remote learning for students that lack consistent Internet access at home.	→
Google Suite Offline Access	Article from Google on setting up offline access for students using Chromebooks and Google Suite products. Includes ideas for offline activities.	→
Using Chromebooks Offline	Guide to using Chromebooks offline for e-learning days. Includes ideas for activities and information on offline functionality.	→
Low-Bandwidth Alternatives	Article categorizes remote learning activities by bandwidth (speed and access to Internet) and immediacy (flexibility in timing) to show the range of options for students with varying Internet access and schedule flexibility.	→

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Endnotes

[1] Bullet points taken with minor edits from: "National Standards for Quality Online Teaching." Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance, 2019. https://www.nsqol.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/National-Standards-for-Quality-Online-Teaching.pdf

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[14] Chart contents taken verbatim with minor alterations to wording from: Oviatt et. al., Op. cit., p. 350.

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[17] Bulleted text taken verbatim from: Ibid.

[18] Personalized learning as defined by, for example, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Elements, EDUCAUSE, Gates Foundation, iNACOL, Institute for Personalized Learning, Knowledge Works, LEAP Innovations, Next Generation Learning, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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