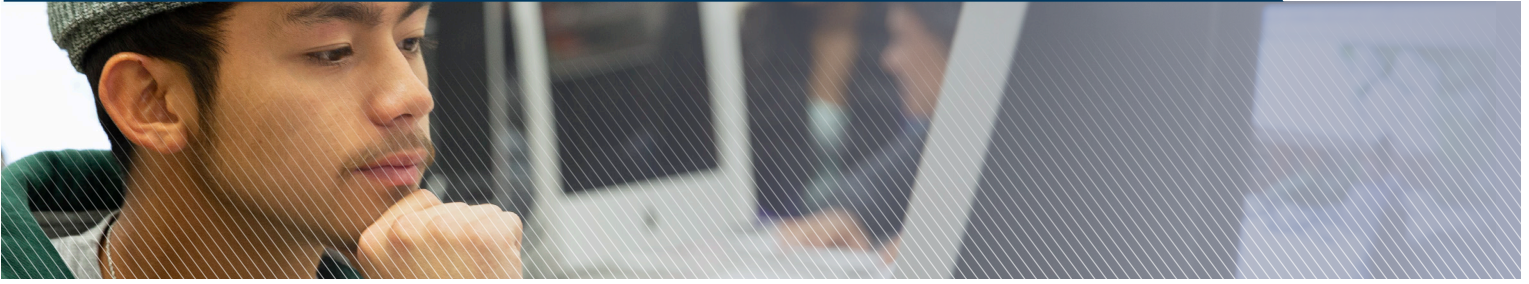


Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic



A flood of people from pre-school teachers to college professors to workforce trainers are researching best practices for learning at distance in response to the COVID-19 school closings. There is a lot of research in this area and good evidence that high-quality learning can happen in distance learning environments. However, all of that research took place in different context than today's. Distance learning during a global pandemic has no precedent. It is a context with no perfectly-aligned research to guide our way. To support the world's educators and students learning at distance during COVID-19 isolation, here are five principles for educators to consider.

1 Change the learning goals and the learning process

It is unreasonable to expect educators and students today to maintain their old normal, even if they were distance learners before. Student's lives are completely different from how they were just a month ago, and what they can accomplish is different as well. Determine reasonable learning goals for your students to achieve (and for you to facilitate) in the current situation and then design a process in which students can meet those goals and you can assess their progress.

2 Design learning activities for the distance learning environment

Avoid the all-too-common and time-consuming pitfall of trying to recreate every in-person learning activity in the distance learning environment. The distance learning environment has its own unique benefits that can't be leveraged if we see in-person learning as the best choice and distance learning as a poor second. Focus on providing distance learning experiences that maximize learner engagement and minimize roadblocks.

3 Prepare for students' upcoming challenges

Learners are likely to experience stress, if not trauma, in the upcoming months — from food insecurity to housing loss to family deaths. It is essential that educators connect with students, respond with empathy, and have a list of community resources for students at the ready.

4 Investigate institutional policies

Learners and their families are also likely to be confused about what their educational institutions are expecting of them. They are asking, "Do my courses count toward graduation?" and "Does my child *have* to join the group conference calls?" and "Where can I pick up assignments?" If you're passionate about any of these organizational policies, get involved in helping those decisions get made (and revised, as the case may be).

5 Model a growth mindset

When your distance learning plans don't work out (and, in all likelihood, at least some of them won't), it is an opportunity to show students how a successful adult responds to failure. The example of how one can productively respond to challenge and disappointment is a valuable gift you can give your students.

And most importantly, when you or your students fail to live up to expectations, generously dole out all the extra grace you can find, because right now, everyone needs it.

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