

NYSUT's "Continuity of Learning" Guidance For Educators DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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Considerations for Teachers, Related Service Providers and Other School Related Professionals

Please note that the information in this NYSUT Fact Sheet is current as of the issuance date.

This NYSUT Fact Sheet is intended to provide guidance on important considerations in addressing New York State's continuity of learning requirement for local leaders and members. **All districts should have submitted their "Continuity of Education" plans to the New York State Education Department by March 19, 2020.**

The key issues to address during the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis start with health and safety concerns and the social emotional needs of students and staff. All education stakeholders should consider the effects of school closures on student achievement and establish plans that not only ensure health and safety and social emotional needs, but also consider continuity of learning to the extent feasible and appropriate. New York state schools must consider the needs of ALL students and strive to ensure that any plans for continuity of learning are equitable and available to all students.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND SUPPORT

The outbreak of COVID-19 is stressful for students and school staff. Fear and uncertainty about the Novel Coronavirus, sick family members or fear of becoming ill, food insecurities, loss of employment, and other factors associated with this unprecedented event can be overwhelming, especially for our youngest and our most vulnerable students.

We must be mindful of the social emotional well-being of our students and adults. As educators, we need to be aware of evolving physical, social and emotional demands of our students while trying to stay connected with them in new ways. We need to think about the whole child and look to social and emotional and trauma-informed practices to help now and when school reopens.

Some ways to support students:

- Try to reach out to your students and/or families and connect in some personal way regularly.
- Suggest your students and families maintain activities and routines as much as possible. Try to eat healthy meals, get some physical exercise, get enough sleep and do things that they enjoy.
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking when interacting with students.
- Infuse social emotional and culturally responsive learning into the activities you plan with your students.

CONTINUITY OF LEARNING

Continuity of learning is the continuation of education in the event of a prolonged school closure or student absence. It is a critical component of school emergency management. Decisions on continuity of learning, including instructional decisions, the use of a variety of methods, access to tools and learning management systems, technological sophistication, curriculum adaptability to digital environment, and resources utilized, are a local decision and are made at local level.

Keeping up with schoolwork will be difficult for many students who don't have computer access, internet connections, or an adult or older sibling to help them with their continued learning. Due to a variety of circumstances, independent completion of student work cannot be guaranteed for all students and some students may not return work at all.

Continuity of learning is being maintained statewide in a variety of ways such as through the use hard-copy packets and online instructional activities. Some additional ways to ensure learning is taking place is to suggest students read, write, including keeping a journal or log, listen to new and different genres of music, do artwork or photography, help plan meals for the week or help with cooking and baking or create a shopping list.

Feedback

Giving thoughtful feedback that informs deeper learning enables teachers to use feedback as a two-way process. When teachers focus on the learning process rather than performance outcomes, feedback becomes a learning experience for both the teachers and students. While a student is the one who receives the feedback, insight into the learning process informs student learning and involves the teacher in figuring out the best way to direct students to academic success. Effective feedback is concrete, specific, useful and given without a value judgement. Feedback is a process in which learners make sense of information about their performance and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies.

Three factors to consider when providing feedback are *timing when you give feedback*, *what you say* when providing feedback as well as *how you say* it. Feedback is most effective when it is given immediately and produces larger learning gains. Sooner is better than later.

When considering what you say be specific about the learning target – emphasize the task not the student’s ability; provide actionable comments so students can take next steps, help students understand their own misconceptions and thinking strategies.

When considering how you say it position the student as an agent (active, not passive) and communicate respect for the student as a learner, share your wondering about the student work and model giving and using feedback as part of lessons.

DATA PRIVACY CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers considering online learning will need to ensure that ANY technology used or the establishment of student accounts to access online resources is approved by the district data protection officer to assure it complies with all applicable laws, including the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, NYS Education Law § 2-d, and Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act which provides accessibility guidelines for students with disabilities.

With remote teaching and communication, educators must exercise caution before sending sensitive information through e-mail. Personally Identifiable Information (PII) includes information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual’s identity either directly or indirectly through linkages with other information. Some examples of PII are student name, parent name(s), student address and student number.

SERVING SPECIAL STUDENT POPULATIONS

• STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

During this national emergency, schools may not be able to provide all services in the same manner they are typically provided. It may be unfeasible or unsafe to provide hands-on physical therapy, occupational therapy, or tactile sign language educational services.

School districts must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those individuals providing education, specialized instruction, and related services to these students. In this unique and ever-changing environment, these exceptional circumstances may affect how all educational and related services and supports are provided. However, school districts must remember that the provision of FAPE may include, as appropriate, special education and related services provided through distance instruction provided virtually, online, or telephonically.

If a school district closes its schools to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19 and does not provide any educational services to the general student population, then a school district would not be required to provide services to students with disabilities during that same period of time. Once school resumes, the district must make every effort to provide special education and related services to the child in accordance with the child’s individualized education program (IEP) or, for students entitled to FAPE under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act.

If a district continues to provide educational opportunities to the general student population during a school closure, the school must ensure that students with disabilities also have equal access to the same opportunities, including the provision of FAPE. Schools must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, each student with a disability can be provided the special education and related services identified in the student’s IEP developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or a plan developed under Section 504. Services provided remotely must continue to comply with FERPA and HIPAA.

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

Learning at home and staying connected with English language learners may be more challenging than with their English proficient peers. English language learners still require tools designed specifically to support them. Due to widespread inequities in terms of access to devices and internet, it is highly recommended that educators provide hard copy resources and tech-free materials to students when possible.

It is imperative that teachers make a concerted effort to reach out not only to ELLs but also their families, particularly as families may have a wide range of questions and concerns related to this crisis based on their own perspective and background experience. Be mindful that families have the legal right to receive communication through their preferred language or mode of communication the parent or person in parental relation best understands. Partnering with English as a New Language (ENL) teachers, family liaisons, and community partners who work closely with these student populations and communities will facilitate efforts.

Resource Links

NYSED Social Emotional Learning Resources

- <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/SELResourcesforCOVID-19.html>

NYSED Continuity of Learning Resources

- <http://www.nysed.gov/edtech/continuity-learning>

Best practices for feedback

- <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/tips-providing-students-meaningful-feedback-marianne-stenger>
- <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/20-ways-to-provide-effective-feedback-for-learning/>
- <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/how-single-point-rubrics-can-improve-quality-student-work/>

USDOE Readiness and Emergency Management in Schools Technical Assistance Center “Supporting Continuity of Teaching and Learning During an Emergency”

- https://rem.s.ed.gov/docs/Supporting_Continuity_of_learning_and_education.pdf

USDOE Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak

- <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/schoolhealth/schoolhealthservices/coronavirus/usde/usde-covid-19-qa-children-disabilities.pdf>

USDOE Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities

- <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/faq/rr/policyguidance/Supple%20Fact%20Sheet%203.21.20%20FINAL.pdf>

Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools

- <https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus>

School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations

- <https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus-ell>

Practical Strategies & Resources to Teach K-12 ELs Online from SupportEd

- <https://padlet.com/diane30/m7j8wz0v3qgb>

NYSUT Corona Virus Toolkit

- <https://www.nysut.org/news/2020/march/coronavirus-toolkit>