

October 2020

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

inside

Anti-racism resources to address racism and bias in schools

A new urgency to address racism is in the spotlight after a series of high-profile, racially motivated tragedies in communities around the country. Social activism and protests have followed, and many students are participating. Now is a good time for districts to reflect on possible bias in policies or curriculum. This list of anti-racism resources may help.

How do you treat your substitutes?

Substitutes provide invaluable services and are often in short supply. This was true even before the pandemic started. Protect this valuable staff pool by including them in your safety planning. Here are tips for ensuring their safety and showing your appreciation.

Make your communications count

Schools are operating under a “new normal” this year and will likely have another new normal next year. It’s a challenging time, and school staff are adding additional duties to already full schedules. Good communications can make the task easier. Plan proactive communications as part of any program decision. Identify the most efficient way to target and message your plans. It will save you time and frustration — and build trust in your decisions.

Managing an online community: troll patrol

Your digital platforms are not self-sufficient. Social media is a two-way channel that requires careful management to minimize troll activity. After you share and publish information, you must be vigilant about responding to comments and managing decorum.

Social media photos for the 2020-21 school year

Photos are an essential part of social media engagement. Schools are now challenged with obtaining photos of student activity that they can share while schools are practicing distance learning. This tip sheet includes guidelines and ideas for getting good photos to maintain engagement on your social channels.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Help your child succeed in online classes

Most schools are opening with distance learning programs this year. Some kids may thrive in virtual classrooms, but others will struggle. It isn’t ideal for learning, but it is an important safety measure, and parents can help their kids be more successful with a positive outlook and a productive “classroom environment” at home.

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Anti-racism resources to address racism and bias in schools

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor have ignited social activism around the country, including a movement to acknowledge and eradicate racism in our schools and education system. Schools are the heart of the community, and students look to their school leaders to set an example and take a stand against injustice. As communities looked on after massive protests erupted, many districts responded quickly by making anti-racism statements in support of Black Lives Matter, and some school boards passed anti-racism resolutions. These are small but important steps that show the community you care and will stand against racism.

If your school board has not passed an anti-racism resolution, here are some examples:

- **Anti-racism template from the Ohio School Boards Association:**
<https://bit.ly/2F5UMkl>
- **Resolution Condemning Racism and Committing to Being an Anti-Racist School District from the Tigard-Tualatin School District**
www.ttsdschools.org/Page/9770

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What else can you do to achieve racial equity? What actions can you take to support students of color? Here are some suggestions:

Provide anti-racism curriculum

Many students around the country are campaigning for schools to provide anti-racist curriculum and instruction. But you don't have to wait for student demands to begin adopting new curriculum. Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org) shares tips for providing anti-racism education in all schools (www.tolerance.org/magazine/all-students-need-antiracism-education).

Anti-racist work should be done no matter your district's demographics. According to Teaching Tolerance, districts that lack diversity "can feel hesitant to discuss these issues since they may not feel it affects them. This idea is a fundamental misunderstanding of what anti-racist work actually is." Conversations about race are difficult, but necessary to bring awareness of racism in our educational systems and work against it.

Anti-racism resources

These are challenging times. Anti-racism activism is happening during a global pandemic that has changed normal life. Schools are facing many operational challenges, but they can get started with help from these resources.



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Teaching Tolerance

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Teaching Tolerance provides free educational resources on race, diversity and equity. It also provides self-guided professional development and facilitator guides complete with protocols, worksheets and presenter slides.

<https://bit.ly/32UFQ0L>

National Education Association's EdJustice

National Education Association's EdJustice has curriculum and classroom appropriate lesson plans on race, ethnicity and Black Lives Matter.

<https://neaedjustice.org/resource/black-lives-matter-school-resources>

National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of School Psychologists has lesson plans for students and staff on race, privilege and implicit bias.

<https://bit.ly/31Y6a1l>

Anti-racism resources

A detailed list of anti-racist books, videos, podcasts compiled in support of Breonna Taylor can be found here.

<https://bit.ly/32SbY5q>

Provide a space to talk about race

According to author Ibram X. Kendi, "The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it — and then dismantle it." Schools need to provide multiple opportunities for discussions about race. Empower students to form anti-racist coalitions and listen to their ideas.

The National Education Association has published a resource guide to normalize race discussions. See tips or download the Racial Justice in Education guide: <https://bit.ly/3gXgl4b>

- Create a welcoming classroom and school
- Root out biases and barriers
- Encourage self-expression
- Be open yourself
- Talk about racism and racial equity

Dive deeper into diversity training

Anti-bias work is a process, and training should be ongoing for all staff and school board members. You don't need to hire an outside consultant for every training. Check out these free resources for activities you can do as a group or individually.

Ten ways school boards can champion racial equity

www.iasb.com/about-us/publications/journal/2018/march-april/ten-ways-school-boards-can-champion-racial-equity

21-Day Racial Equity Challenge

This is a web-based activity that can be done on your own at your own pace or with a group on a monthly basis. It also has a reflection journal template and a community discussion forum.

<https://bit.ly/2DqoRuz>

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Dismantling Racism Works

Dismantling Racism Works has published a workbook with a range of resources, including how to form caucuses and teams in race equity work, race equity principles for taking action and a race equity tool for organizations in developing explicit goals.

www.dismantlingracism.org

Racial Equity Tools

Racial Equity Tools hosts a library of over 2,500 resources to help organizations and individuals in their equity work. Of current interest are their COVID-19 racial equity and social justice resources.

www.racialequitytools.org/home

Recent events have presented the opportunity to make systemic changes to ensure schools are welcoming and safe for all students. Take action to establish anti-racist policies. Talk about race and listen to those affected by discrimination. Make equity work a priority and show students you are ready for change.

Contributed by Erin Good, communications consultant

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How do you treat your substitutes?

Many school districts will start the year remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but that won't negate the need for substitutes. Teachers, secretaries, custodians and other staff still will get sick, have doctor or dentist appointments or other situations where they need some time off to tend to personal business.

The need for substitutes may be higher than ever in districts that are able to offer in-person instruction. Some teachers — especially those who are at higher risk of complications from COVID-19 because of age or underlying medical conditions — are weighing whether they will even go back to their jobs while the pandemic continues. That could result in the need for long-term substitutes.

Many districts already scramble to find substitute bus drivers, so that may be even more of a challenge while the pandemic continues, especially with many drivers in the “at risk” age group. The same is true of other support staff, such as food-service workers. Most districts are still providing school breakfast and lunch, even if schools are offering distance learning.

Quarantine requirements also create a greater need for substitutes. Most districts follow precautions requiring staff to self-quarantine after exposure to COVID-19 and stay home with any mild symptoms of illness. In the past, staff might come to school with a minor sore throat or cold, but that is discouraged now.

So, as the new year begins, recruiting and training substitutes should be a priority to ensure that you have people available when you need them. Typically, districts don't offer much training for substitutes, but in this time of change, training will be critical to help your substitutes be well-prepared to step in.

Things will be different for regular staff, and even more so for substitutes. Most will not have experience with distance learning. Most will not be familiar with the safety and cleaning protocols for COVID-19 because this is all new for everyone.

Here are some tips for preparing substitutes for their assignments:

Train, train, train.

All substitutes — whether teachers, educational assistants, clerical staff or bus drivers — need explicit training on working in a pandemic. Online tools, such as Zoom and Google Meet, make it easier and more convenient for substitutes to attend trainings, even the night before an assignment. Substitute teachers may need instruction in how to use some of the classroom instructional programs, as well as online testing procedures and protocols.

Put it in writing.

Be as clear as possible in writing out specific instructions, so that your substitutes understand

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and are comfortable with their role and what's expected of them. For substitute teachers, it will be important to provide not only the usual lesson plans, but also tips and guidance on how to teach effectively in a remote classroom.

Assign them to a specific school.

While there is often competition for popular, skilled substitutes, it is good practice during these times to assign substitutes to specific buildings. It not only helps the substitutes build stronger relationships with students and faculty, but it also helps reduce the number of people a substitute is exposed to over the course of a work week.

Know the COVID-19 Response Plan.

Every school should have a plan in place to protect staff, students and families from the spread of COVID-19, and also a response plan in place if a student, teacher, or staff member tests positive for the virus. Make sure all staff, including substitutes, have a copy of these plans — or know where to access them on the website.

Keep them safe.

Substitutes fill an important need in schools, and many districts have faced a shortage of qualified substitutes. Wages are generally not very high, and they don't receive sick leave or health benefits. That's the job, and they understand it, but they should feel as safe as possible when they work in schools. Share the safety protocols, and be sure they know that keeping them safe is a priority.

Show appreciation.

Even in normal times, the start of school is a stressful time as staff prepare for a new year. But in a pandemic, it involves so much more — learning new systems for distance learning, initiating new safety protocols including face masks and social distancing, communicating through online platforms. It's important to take time to thank substitutes and recognize the important contribution they are making because schools will not be able to operate efficiently — perhaps even at all — without them. Whether it's a quick email of thanks, a written note or a short video on the website noting their contribution, it's important to let them know they are valued and appreciated.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant

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Make your communications count

Schools are different than normal because of coronavirus. This “new normal” is different than the “new normal” of last spring, and it is likely to be different again next year. Schools are doing as much as ever — with many unknowns and countless challenges.

With all these issues facing schools today, communication is even more important. School board members, superintendents, principals and teachers must communicate about all of the recent changes effectively and efficiently, to allow them to balance all of their new duties. Neglecting communications, especially when times are tough, is like leaving the pot over an open flame until it boils over or catches fire. You have to spend much more time cleaning up the mess.

Districts have been in reaction mode since spring. The goal now is to be proactive. Recognize challenges, assess limitations and zero in on the method of communication that will pay the biggest dividend for the time spent. Here are some suggestions for board members, superintendents, principals and teachers.

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School board school liaison program

Direct communication — face-to-face communication — has always been the most effective means of building trust and sharing messages. Now is clearly not the time for close contact, but board members can still have a presence among staff and in schools via remote channels. Regular school audiences still need to know who board members are and that they care about the schools they serve. Consider working with principals to attend virtual staff meetings. As long as an additional presence doesn't disrupt the agenda, the meeting could provide a helpful new perspective about operations and challenges.

If your district doesn't already have one, consider developing a school board liaison network to connect individual board members to specific schools. This works for large-, medium- or small-size districts. Divide schools and programs equally among board members. Board liaisons will schedule visits to schools/programs on a regular basis. Infrequent visits are fine until operations normalize.

When you can, get to know the principal, spend a lunch hour with students and staff, attend a faculty meeting, and attend school performances and special programs. Include monthly school reports on the board's agenda so that each board member can share what students are learning and how their schools/programs are dealing with the challenges they face.

Superintendents' key communicator networks

Superintendents can build a powerful tool to share information and inform opinions by building a key communicator network. This network of individuals represents influencers and

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the variety of diverse community members in the district. This is a helpful program during normal operations, and it can help expand the effectiveness of your communications during crises.

Making regular communication with key community leaders and opinion leaders your priority this year can pay off for any superintendent. Research shows, in most communities, approximately 10% of people influence the views of everyone else. Identify this influential 10%. Tell them facts about their schools or district, and ask them to tell others. Having these “key communicators” is a powerful tool for listening, learning what community members are saying, and providing accurate information about student learning and school operations.

If you don't have a key communicator network, start one. If you already have one, make sure your list and contact information is current and includes a range of community leaders. Make sure these key communicators come from all walks of life — elected officials, business leaders, ministers, senior citizens, parent leaders, long-time community residents, and the hairdresser who talks about schools all day as he/she cuts hair.

These opinion leaders also provide a valuable service to your district by acting as ears in the community and letting you know what they are hearing. These people are the living, breathing community grapevine. Identify who they are and get them on your team.

Tips for your key communicator network:

- Include representatives from all ethnic groups in your community.
- Provide opportunities for any interested community member to join.
- Give participants the choice of getting information by email or regular mail.
- Provide information and updates on a regular basis.
- Provide opportunities to listen to key communicator opinions and find out what they really want to know.

For more information about forming and maintaining key communicator networks, go to the National School Public Relations Association website: www.nspra.org/node/1250.

Note: All information sent to key communicators should be sent to staff as well. Make this information the basis for your primary internal and external communications. It will save time and assure that everyone is getting the same information.

Principal-to-neighborhood outreach

Principals generally have good systems in place for communicating with parents. Keeping websites current and newsletters on schedule is standard practice.

Neighborhood schools can greatly expand their reach by getting to know their neighbors, especially those neighbors with no children in school. Make a plan to build connections after in-person contact resumes.

A good way to identify likely interested neighbors is to get a list of registered voters from the county elections office for precincts in the school attendance area. Ask for voters who voted in the last four elections. Eliminate addresses outside the attendance boundary and note voters' ages. Almost all of them will be 60 years of age or older, and they likely have had no contact with the schools in years. Send each of them a personalized letter introducing yourself, telling them something about your school and inviting them to a school program or school tour. List ways they could volunteer, too. Neighbors in this group will often sign up to help a child with reading. Follow-up with mid-year and end-of-year reports.

This effort will help you build a cadre of enthusiastic volunteers, as well as strong support for school initiatives.

Effective
Communications

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Teacher/parent partnerships

Tech-savvy parents expect teachers to maintain websites with student assignments and classroom information. Parents also expect teachers to respond quickly to emails about their student's progress. All of this takes time and requires good organizational skills to maintain. However, take time to make personal phone calls to parents at the beginning of the school year to introduce yourself and let parents know you have high expectations for their student's learning. This can go a long way to getting the school year off to a good start and building solid, cooperative relationships with parents. It also gives you an opportunity to let parents know what your expectations are as partners for their student's success.

Contributed by Jeanne Magmer, communications consultant

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Managing an online community: troll patrol

Your digital platforms are not self-sufficient; these two-way communication channels require careful management. Sharing and publishing information is step one. Responding to comments and managing decorum is step two.

How you build it will determine how you manage it

Successful online community management is the result of a few key factors, starting with building a solid purpose or cohesive reason for people to gather and dialogue in your social media in the first place. Define your purpose clearly. Having a target can be much better than hosting a general forum that invites random comments like those in newspaper stories that change day by day or minute by minute. If you inherit an online community to manage, consider reforming it by building in a key purpose. This can be an important strategy for taming something that can often be like the wild, wild west.

At the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), I manage Facebook, several Twitter and Instagram accounts as well as YouTube, LinkedIn and Snapchat. We try to keep things as simple as possible to keep things positive and on-track.

Here's how I built a sense of purpose for ODFW's social media

In almost all cases, a single account is better than managing multiple accounts. If there are multiple accounts in schools and districts, there are also, usually, multiple managers. For example, school administrators will manage the school account, while coaches or parent volunteers will manage team accounts.

Multiple accounts can make things complicated. But at ODFW, we serve a variety of constituents with many different interests. Some are interested in hunting, some in fishing, and some in wildlife viewing. So, I created several different Instagram and Twitter accounts to inform and engage with people who have differing interests.

I built a sense of purpose into each account, creating content related to that purpose. For instance, our Marine Instagram account focuses only on ocean research (@odfwmarine). This makes managing the comments easier, as they need to relate to ocean research. Off-topic commenters are referred to our main account. This allows our main account to focus mostly on hunting and fishing news and information while having the ability to amplify our other accounts when needed.

I created a social media guideline that we post in the about section of our Facebook page, though it applies to all our social media platforms. This is referred to any time we deal with comments that do not meet our guidelines. Guidelines or policies like this can help maintain a sense of purpose, keeping comments related to the post, discouraging bad

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behavior that while protected, doesn't often encourage people to participate in discussions. *See the policy on Facebook: www.facebook.com/pg/MyODFW/about*

I encourage active commenting across all of our platforms. To do this, I not only answer questions, I actively dialogue with people in the comments to encourage more commenting and to keep things on topic. This is time-consuming, but it sets a standard for how your social media will be managed, and people expect it to stay this way.

Each platform is run with its own sense of purpose, its own voice and with the same guidelines, all of which create a safer space for more people to feel empowered to comment and participate in dialogue.

Taming the trolls

The second key factor is maintaining a consistent presence in the comments of posts and knowing when to use private conversation platforms like direct messages.

Even the most purposeful social media will still attract trolls. In fact, the more purposeful, the more potent the trolls can be. Dealing with trolls can be exhausting work, and the most important thing for anyone who has to manage difficult comments and commenters on a regular basis is to take care of yourself first. Know your limits, and don't get overwhelmed. When I've reached my negativity limit, I often take a walk to clear my head and reset my focus. There are many ways to handle the negativity associated with online forums today, but being able to set some boundaries and putting your own health and safety first is the most important thing.

There are many kinds of trolling behavior on social media, but the most typical are commenters who purposefully attack the purpose of the social media platform you've built or those who try to derail the conversation or the topic of a particular post. Knowing what a troll's intentions are can help make managing them easier.

Commenters that constantly attack the purpose of the social media platform, because they disagree with it, can be frustratingly consistent or relentless. This distracts from the purpose of each and every post. So, I often pull them over to the DMs, or direct message area, to engage with them privately. More often than not, they want attention, and even a 15-20 minute chat in the DMs can take their focus off the destructive behavior of derailing a particular post. But it won't often solve the overall problem, and you should not expect it to.

For trolling behavior that seeks to derail a particular conversation, I'll often call the commenter out directly and encourage them to participate in the topic of conversation, reminding them that off-topic comments are not necessarily protected speech and can be deleted. This often results in another comment more directly related to the topic at hand. If possible, I try to leave it there. It shows strength and keeps them operating within the social media guidelines.

In a well-built and solidly maintained online community, you will develop allies. And while they are good for the ego and for helping stand up to bad behavior, they can sometimes get carried away and make things worse. It's a good idea to maintain good relationships with your online community allies, so you can jump into their DMs and remind them of the purpose of the community and of the post. They usually appreciate this and desire to stay in your good graces. This can make them more effective in how they communicate with trolls on your behalf, thereby increasing the likelihood that the troll will abandon their efforts to derail the conversation.

There isn't a one-size solution to fit every situation you will encounter while managing an online community. Like any community, setting guidelines, communicating clearly, following-up, maintaining courteous behavior by modeling it for others, having patience and using your ability to wield a form of enforcement — whether that's banning someone for a set period of time or reporting their behavior to the social networks — are some of the most effective strategies out there.

Contributed by Timothy Akimoff, social media director, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Social media photos for the 2020-21 school year

Education looks different this school year, and social media posts will reflect that. What are some best practices when it comes to the images we share? How will schools with distance learning share photos of student activity?

Schools will need to be careful to ensure that students follow safety guidelines and minimize critical comments on social media posts.

Here's a question recently posted on Facebook:

“Hey everyone! We want to send out a communication to our social media admins at our schools as a reminder to be sensitive about what images and videos are posted this school year. For example, try to social distance in photos and if closer than six feet, always wear a mask. Has anyone created a print piece related to this topic? I would love to see your ideas!”

Based on the comments on that post, many others wanted guidance as well. We've got you covered. Download the one-page photo guide on the socialschool4edu.com website for an easy-to-share tip sheet that will explain what to look out for. It also includes ideas for posts — broken down by in-person and online learning.

The tip sheet is attached here, or you can sign up to access it on the website:
<https://socialschool4edu.respond.ontraport.net/social-media-photo-guide-2020-2021>

Photo tips

In-Person

Guidelines:

- If masks are required, photos should include masks. Make sure both mouth and nose are covered. Encourage a thumbs up to show positivity in lieu of a visible smile. Encourage your subjects to smile under their masks. Even with your mouth not visible, your eyes show your smile. This is called a “smeyes.” Coined by model Tyra Banks, it means smiling with your eyes, and it is noticeable.
- A photo showing just one student might be the safest to share.
- Watch the background! Questions on social distancing could create a comment storm. Follow the same guidelines for in-person proximity.

Ideas:

- A short video of a student explaining something new they learned
- Students engaged in learning while observing safety guidelines
- Recess time!
- A video or photo of students reading out loud
- Students with their artwork — this could be a weekly feature.

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Virtual

Social Media
Photos

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Guidelines:

- Avoid sharing pictures of video conferences that display student names.
- Incorporate photos and videos into class assignments. Teachers can ask parents to send photos or videos of their child completing an assignment. Carefully review photos before posting them, and post only with approval.
- Make sure backgrounds are appropriate. Do not post photos taken in bedrooms. Ensure the student is dressed appropriately and no siblings are in the background.

Ideas:

- Completing a science experiment
- Practicing a musical instrument
- Showcasing a completed project
- Demonstrating a new skill
- Enjoying at-home physical education
- Showing their favorite spot to work
- Collect learning success stories from staff and parents — this could be a weekly feature.

Realize that no matter how careful you are, there could still be critical comments on your school social media posts. Do your best and start the school year with clear guidelines in place.

Please also pay close attention to sharing photos from pre-COVID-19 days... We have heard stories about schools that got blasted with negative comments after posting photos showing teachers and students giving each other high fives with no masks. Just be careful if you're sharing photos that don't follow social distancing or mask requirements.

I'm not saying you can't use any of these photos on social media, but I would strongly urge you to add a note to your post that says something like, "Special note — this photo was taken on the first day of school in 2019 when social distancing and masks were not required." Consider using Throwback Thursday, #TBT, or Flashback Friday, #FBF, hashtags.

Finally, I'd like to send you off with a host of photo examples that might inspire you and your staff. Photos in this gallery are from across the country and show that you can still celebrate your schools during the 2020/2021 school year!

Check out the gallery here: <https://bit.ly/2Z4pUIi>.

Attachment: Social Media Photo Guide

Contributed by Andrea Gribble. She runs #SocialSchool4EDU, a company that partners with schools across the country to manage social media. Andrea and her team manage social media for more than 35 districts across the country and has trained over 500 schools. Andrea holds an MBA from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and is a frequent speaker at educational conferences on the topic of social media.



SOCIAL MEDIA PHOTO GUIDE

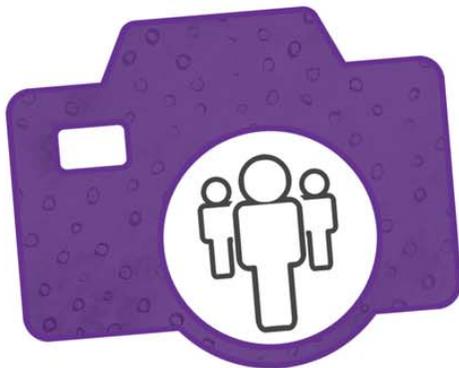
Learning looks different this year, but there is still much to celebrate!
When posting photos on social media, keep these guidelines in mind.

for 2020/2021

IN-PERSON

GUIDELINES:

- If masks are required, photos should include masks. Make sure both mouth and nose are covered. Encourage a thumbs up to show positivity in lieu of a visible smile.
- A photo showing just one student might be the safest to share.
- Watch the background! Questions on social distancing could create a comment storm.



IDEAS:

- A short video of a student explaining something new they learned
- Students engaged in learning while observing safety guidelines
- Recess time!
- Students reading out loud - video or photo
- Students with their artwork - could be a weekly feature

VIRTUAL



GUIDELINES:

- Avoid sharing pictures of video conferences that display student names.
- Incorporate photos and videos into class assignments. Teachers can ask parents to send photos or videos of their child completing an assignment. Carefully review photos before posting them, and post only with approval.
- Make sure backgrounds are appropriate. Do not post photos taken in bedrooms. Ensure the student is dressed appropriately and no siblings are in the background.

IDEAS:

- Completing a science experiment
- Practicing a musical instrument
- Showcasing a completed project
- Demonstrating a new skill
- Enjoying at-home phy-ed
- Showing their favorite spot to work
- Collect learning success stories from staff and parents - could be a weekly feature

Realize that no matter how careful you are, there could still be critical comments on your school social media posts. Do your best and start with the school year with clear guidelines in place!

For Families



Help your child succeed in online classes



**October
2020**

INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Kids around the country have attended, or will attend, school remotely because of pandemic health and safety requirements. This instructional system will work great for some students, especially older ones. But it is difficult for others, and even unworkable for the youngest students or those with special education needs. .

One mother in Georgie shared a heartbreaking image of her kindergarten son crying at his desk while trying to learn via computer. See the photo on cnn.com: <https://cnn.it/2Z7xNge>.

This is sad, and parents are struggling to help their children manage emotional and educational challenges. Since it is what school looks like now, the only option is to follow expert guidance and do our best to have a good school year in this new format.

Tips to make online school better for your child

Parents can help their kids adjust and get the most out of their classes with a few tips from homeschooling experts. Read the whole list, published by USA Today, <https://bit.ly/3IL9M8d>.

Several homeschooling experts shared these tips to help parents transform their home into a more ideal classroom environment with USA Today. What can you buy to optimize your kid's academic performance? How can you help them through this experience? Scroll through to see what tips and tricks can help you get your remote learning act together for kids of all ages:

Set up your "classroom"

Invest in a new desk

Sitting at a desk can help students feel like they are in school. Be sure they have comfortable learning space to study. It should be big enough for a computer and writing space, have a comfortable chair and be welcoming. Let your students personalize it with photos and posters.

Find the right place to study

Give some thoughtful consideration to where your child will study. Find a spot with a view, such as next to a window or in a quiet corner if they prefer minimal distractions. Try to carve out a space near a source of natural light. Research shows that students learn better when they study in areas with daylight and fresh air.

Purchase headphones

Headphones or earbuds can help block out noise and improve concentration. This is especially important when all members of the household are working from home.

Minimize distractions with a screen divider

A physical divider or screen can reduce distractions in a busy household. A workstation screen can help create a separate classroom space for your child.

Accommodate high-focus instructional activities

Give your child space by taking a walk around the block. Bring the dog if you have one. A quiet house will help your child focus during online exams and intense instructional activities.

Get mentally prepared

Dress for success

Buy new school clothes to kick off the school year. Or, buy new pajamas if that helps your child get a smoother start to the day.

Keep a checklist

At home, there is no school bell between classes. Help your child visualize class time transitions with a checklist on a whiteboard. Let your child check off the completed activities and view the day's schedule from their workspace.

Keep track of your students' online schedule

Keep school schedules accessible in the household. Awareness of school activities will help prevent disruptive interruptions during classroom Zoom sessions.

Set phone boundaries

Designated school time should mean limited phone time. Students can focus better without the distraction of social media notifications and activity. Consider allowing a phone check-in during breaks and lunch time.

Model a positive attitude

Start your day with a positive attitude. Your children will follow your lead. Be careful about sharing your personal frustrations with online learning. If you don't like it, your child will almost certainly dislike it, too. And be prepared to be a "classroom assistant" to your child. A new online system and a new instructional model for your student will require extra assistance with the systems and the school work.

Build in screen breaks

Students benefit from taking a break from computer-based learning. Help your child engage their brains differently by limiting non-school screen time. Read books, do art projects and practice academic skills on paper worksheets with a pencil.

Have fun outside

Don't forget recess. Exercise is important for learning and fun physical activities can recharge students between classes. Plan for organized activities — perhaps a family bike ride — and time for free play.

Try to relax

Even with careful planning, this new school model may seem overwhelming and stressful to students and parents alike. Mistakes happen. Try to do better next time and be patient with each other.