

# RECOMMENDED DISTRICT POLICIES FOR AT-HOME TEACHING AND LEARNING

BY PUBLIC IMPACT

*Note: The policy recommendations here were crafted for the 2020 COVID-19 school closures. Many of the policies would apply for at-home learning in any context (minus “social distancing” for a virus).*

In the rapid shift to at-home teaching and learning, many district policies need to shift as well. The recommendations that follow stem from a review of policies of virtual schools and districts in response to COVID-19 as well as Public Impact experience, always focused on: **What policies are both feasible and most likely to produce strong learning outcomes for all students, especially disadvantaged learners?** These will be updated as districts, schools, and Public Impact continue to learn during the shift, and we welcome your **feedback**.

## POLICIES: HARDWARE, SOFTWARE, AND INTERNET ACCESS AND MAINTENANCE

**Recommended:** Provide all pre-K–12 students with a laptop equipped with age-appropriate software, and with high-speed internet access in the home (provided or reimbursed for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch). Additionally, provide one printer per family, one pack of printer paper per student per month, and access to remotely provided technical maintenance and assistance. If making a transition urgently, districts should pursue temporary solutions to provide access, such as offering free mobile devices for families to check out and use as hot spots.

**Reasoning:** Laptops are the most cost-efficient and effective way to provide face-to-face teaching and learning at home. Most families have technology at home, but many do not have a device for each child or the high-speed internet needed for videoconferencing. Paper packets of instructional materials may be needed while schools make the transition, but teachers and students need technology-enabled face-to-face time for the best outcomes. Some districts collaborate with providers to get laptops to all students and provide internet to all for free or a low cost. Physical distribution can be done at centers (with proper social distancing rules, when at-home learning is triggered by virus spread) and/or through bus delivery to neighborhoods.

## POLICIES: SAFETY IN ONLINE INTERACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

**Recommended:** Set clear restrictions on student and teacher use of video and audio technology and recordings. These policies are complex but essential for student safety.

Our basic recommendations include:

1. Districts and schools should choose videoconferencing platforms based on privacy and security features, and require users to institute those features (for example, see Zoom recommendations [here](#); Microsoft Teams recommendations [here](#)).
2. Students and parents should be sent a statement by email and phone notifying them that student use of videoconferencing or school property for classwork constitutes assent by the parent and student that no person, other than a teacher or other authorized district or school staff, will: record audio- or videoconferences among students and/or teachers; nor will any person post any portion on the internet; nor store or share recordings digitally or in any other form.
3. Teachers should be required to record and upload all online individual and group meetings to the district server or an assigned platform. Teachers should be prohibited from storing recordings on any other server or device or digitally sharing any recorded images or materials other than for the purpose of teaching students, leading a teaching team, or collaborating with a teaching team, principal, or assistant principal.
4. Offensive behavior, such as insertion of inappropriate images or sounds during a videoconference, should result in the same consequences as if the behavior occurred in person in school (adjusted for the virtual environment).
5. These policies may be amended at any time to protect the safety and privacy of students and to comply with FERPA and other requirements. (The district should notify students and families of any policy updates.)

Districts should start with existing staff conduct policies and edit them to allow school-related communications online, but retain limits on personal engagement not needed for educational purposes. Here is one example of detailed behavior policies for **staff conduct with students** in a virtual school.

### **POLICIES: STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND SEAT TIME**

**Recommended:** Require students to log in online to register learning time both face-to-face with a teacher (or assistant) and when doing assignments at home for a minimum number of hours. Phone and email messages should be sent to parents of students not logged in by noon each day. Minimum log-in time should be approximately four hours daily for elementary students, five hours for middle school students, and six hours for high school students. Some students, especially in middle and high school, may need to spend more time some days to complete larger projects and assignments, as they typically do at home. Students are not typically working on screens for all of these hours, even while logged in; they may, for example, be solving math problems or writing by hand, doing projects, studying vocabulary words, or reading an assigned book. Policies should generally follow the same considerations as in-school policies, such as allowance for student sick time and post-sickness work make-up.

Districts may adopt weekly hour counts instead of daily hour counts (except for required daily student-teacher face time), and all should adopt annual total hour counts (prorated for the portion of the school year affected by school building closures) that comply with their state's policies, with the above hour levels counting as "days." Note: Alternative procedures for recording paper or phone time will be needed for students without technology access in the weeks before a district provides devices and internet to all.

**Reasoning:** While it's tempting to substitute completed work for time, these minimum hours—less than typical school time, and far less than school plus homework time—are groundwork for teachers to assign appropriately engaging and continually advancing work to ensure student learning growth. When students do not log time, this is a cue for rapid outreach to students by teachers, assistants, social workers, and counselors to help tackle practical, academic, emotional, and other barriers, so that students and families are not alone with their burdens. Other cues that students and families need extra outreach from school staff include missed assignments, declining mastery or grades, and persistent inattention or behavior problems during face-to-face time on screen.

### **POLICIES: TEACHERS' WORK HOURS**

#### **To teach students, meet with their multi-classroom leader (MCL) teams, and respond to messages**

**Recommended:** Teachers should be available during the same work hours overall as they are when in-person school is in session, and to engage with students (together or in small groups) face-to-face for a total of *at least* half of the scheduled class time per subject/course. Teachers should have posted office hours for live questions that equal remaining class time (not used for face-to-face) plus at least another hour daily. All required meetings should be scheduled within regular school hours, except those that would normally be scheduled during other hours. Teachers also should be required to respond to communications in the usual period of time, for example, within 24 hours or in time for a helpful response under the specific circumstances for students, and within 48 hours for families. In the short term, and if a teacher is sick or otherwise unavailable, schools must provide a reasonable substitute to respond to students and families—ideally a member of the same instructional team or the multi-classroom leader.

**Examples:** All face-to-face class time, MCL team meetings, and teacher-principal meetings should be scheduled during regular in-person school hours. (See **schedule examples** for Opportunity Culture schools, which adhere to this recommendation.) If a student has a question about a test that is the next day, the teacher should attempt to respond. A teacher would be expected to respond to a student question posted during office hours, but a teacher would not be expected to respond to an 11 p.m. question about an 8 a.m. test the next day. Districts may want to post and disseminate examples to guide students, who will be learning how to collaborate virtually, and families.

### **POLICIES: FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING**

**Recommended:** Teachers should use a combination of online face-to-face teaching and student assignments completed without the teacher present, but with daily office hours for help. Total teacher time with all students face-to-face should be a minimum of half of the regularly scheduled class/course time. Each elementary student should have at least 60 to 90 minutes total of face-to-face time with teachers and reach associates each day if the district is using a compressed, half-day schedule; and at least two to three hours total per day if the district is using a full-day schedule. Each secondary student should have scheduled face-to-face time of at least 15 percent of the regularly scheduled class or course time if the district is using a compressed, half-day schedule; and at least 20 percent of the regularly scheduled course time if the district is using a full-day schedule.

**Reasoning:** All-asynchronous learning has a poor track record with disadvantaged students, despite its appeal for logistical ease and for advanced students with minimal learning barriers. (See [this slide deck](#) for more on the research on asynchronous learning.)

Semi-synchronous learning (some time with teacher and students engaging, some time with students working on their own) allows teachers to make eye contact and engage emotionally with students to motivate. Teachers should break whole-class instructional time up to allow for face-to-face small-group time, for more intensive and personal instruction. The times here are the bare minimum recommended until research further illuminates this.

### **POLICIES: PROVIDING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

**Recommended:** Services for students who are English language learners or who have special needs should be adapted to provide the best possible learning outcomes within the constraints of at-home teaching and learning. Districts should identify groups of students for whom accommodations will be difficult and adopt district recommendations, requirements, and strong district staff assistance for schools and teachers to help determine how to implement accommodations virtually.

The differences among student needs are extensive, and we do not attempt here to address them all. Here are some general principles for districts to follow in consultation with legal counsel:

1. Teachers and other personnel should continue to deliver instruction and services in compliance with all IEPs and 504 plans, and with services needed by students for whom English is a second language, whenever possible.
2. Teachers should change coursework to accommodate at-home learning for these students; principals should support this process, using the skills of school and district interventionists.
3. Schools should provide short videoconference tutorials with students clustered in small groups to get the on-point attention they need. This will help address a wide range of needs, including language, attention deficit, and learning challenges partially addressed through direct, explicit instruction.
4. When a school cannot fully meet an IEP or 504 with at-home learning using the methods above, the school must consult with the student's IEP committee to determine alternatives, such as 1:1 tutoring support multiple times weekly using reach associates, multi-classroom leaders, a portion of teacher office hours, and ELL or special needs interventionists.
5. Teachers who cannot fulfill a student's IEP or 504 with at-home learning must document—and the district should provide sup-

port for that documentation—when at-home instruction inhibits meeting a student's needs.

6. Using teachers' input and their own analysis of student needs, districts should identify students for whom at-home learning will not be possible and arrange group care (with any needed social distancing or other adaptations) and instruction in compliance with federal and state laws, including any emergency provisions for current events.

For links to resources for addressing a variety of special needs when students are working at home, see the Educating All Learners Alliance [Resources](#) page.

### **POLICIES: ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

**Recommended:** Student assignment schedules and grading policies should continue as when school is in session, but with a triple tier of deadlines for students to make up missed work. After temporary waivers during a period of time for adjusting and establishing the technology that students need at home—such as three weeks—student assignment schedules and grading policies should resume, with one exception—that students should be given triple deadlines. Those deadlines should be set as: An initial due date for class assignments or testing date for assessments, another within one week but not less than 24 hours later than the original deadline, and another at the end of the current grading period (for example, a half-quarter mark, except in the case of serious illness, in which case the end of the quarter). Grading policies should continue as usual; when a student's grades decline or persist at a low level, the teacher should persistently—at least three times until there is a response leading to action—contact both the student and family to offer additional assistance during office hours or in a small group as part of usual class periods.

Even if the state cancels official end-of-year assessments, teachers and their team should continue to regularly assess student learning and use data to adjust whole-class and individual instruction.

**Reasoning:** While it may be tempting to give up on assessments and asking students to wrestle with new or challenging work assignments, each year of their lives and learning is precious. Continuing to help students focus on learning, while providing them with layers of support—as whole classes, in small groups, one-on-one with a teacher, and with counselors and social workers—will help more students grow over the long term, and help more students achieve positive feelings of purpose, mastery, and resilience during difficult times.

At the same time, triple deadlines allow students to continue making learning progress and remain accountable for their learning, but also allow students to make up for challenges caused by technology, personal issues, or family disruptions. In the event that at-home learning is extended, for example for a whole semester, these same policies can continue, with considerations for the feasibility for students and teachers—but always putting student learning first.

### **POLICIES: HONOR CODES FOR STUDENT ASSESSMENTS TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS PURSUE MASTERY**

**Recommended:** Districts should follow their existing honor codes, adopt test monitoring using at-home technology, and provide strong layers of academic and personal support to students to promote fairness and student integrity. Districts must re-communicate old policies, along with the new, to all students and families when moving to at-home learning. Districts without a clear honor code should immediately adopt one that clarifies what work students must complete without the help of others, what sources students may use, and what requirements for proctoring or verification apply to each assignment or test. For assessments that would normally be conducted in class, and in districts that have achieved 1:1 technology, students should be asked to record test-taking with web cameras or have tests proctored in a videoconference. Needs of students who have extended-time testing accommodations must be honored (see the special needs section above).

**Reasoning:** Maintaining, and even reinforcing, an honor system focused on learning for oneself, not just a grade, will help students for the long term. However, a strong honor system must be combined with strong layers of support for each student. Most students who cheat do so out of feelings of fear and inadequacy rather than malicious intent; addressing their fears with academic, emotional, and practical support will be more effective than halting assessments, ceasing honor codes, or adhering to strict honor standards without providing strong academic and personal support.

### **POLICIES: TEACHER SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION**

**Recommended:** Districts should continue or adopt teacher-led teams and schedules to promote strong instructional leadership, collaboration, and improvement during at-home teaching and learning. Opportunity Culture schools organized around teacher-led teams have a distinct advantage in times of change or crisis, and districts should expect schools to continue these teams and support them in doing so. Districts should ask schools to maintain

all Multi-Classroom Leadership team collaboration and coaching schedules, as well as schoolwide leadership teams that include multi-classroom leaders. MCLs should make sure that every teacher and reach associate has a backup person or people, in case a team member needs to take a leave or extended sick time. Likewise, every principal should identify who would take the reins if an MCL is out for an extended period—another MCL, an assistant principal, the principal, or a team teacher who has earned the respect of others by producing high-growth student learning and displaying leadership competencies. Districts without Opportunity Culture or without widespread Multi-Classroom Leadership should consider adopting a transitional version immediately, with the goal of full transition in subsequent years.

**Reasoning:** The instructional guidance and professional and personal support that MCLs provide is just as crucial when students and teachers are at home. One-on-one and small-group videoconferences make continuing the leadership cycle feasible in all but the most unusual circumstances. The support MCLs can provide may be even more important during at-home learning induced by a crisis, which affects the availability and attention of teachers and staff.

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