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Expert Tips

Resources & Tips for Remote Education During School Closures

- By Karen Srba
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With more states declaring a state of emergency, public and private K–12 schools are closing their doors and sending students, teachers and staff home to learn and work remotely. For some schools remote learning is not new, especially for private parochial schools. Many parochial schools have been using snow days and teacher professional development days for remote learning for many years. Public school systems have not followed their private school counterparts into remote learning. Today the Coronavirus has left public school systems and private schools scrambling to find alternative ways to continue to educate students for an extended period of time.

As a former high school teacher and virtual K–12 teacher, I can sympathize with my former colleagues who are now forced to provide rigorous and engaging learning to thousands of students nationwide. The good news, many school systems have already adopted technology that can assist teachers with this monumental task, although other teachers are starting from scratch and must put their lessons online within days to avoid a disruption in learning, help is available.

Here are tips for all of those K–12 teachers who are working to quickly go online and for teachers and administrators who are calming the fears of parents who have never learned through online education and are fearful that their child will be left behind.

1. Take a deep breath and find a free learning management system (LMS) if your district doesn't already have one. Google Classroom is free, as well as Moodle for up to 50 users. Finding a free solution will give you a gradebook, collaborative ability to work with students and other free resources to add rigor, engagement and pedagogy to your online classroom.

2. All teachers must have lessons plans for their daily classes. So taking those plans and putting them online is a cinch. As a classroom teacher and online teacher, I listed my lessons directly on the LMS daily. Those lessons included objectives for the day, a warm-up question that I later converted to a discussion forum in the LMS, the readings for the day, a video from me on the key

points of the lesson and any other lecture items that were needed for that day, as well as the assignments or exercises for that lesson. NOTE: instead of spreading these out throughout the LMS tools, I made one page with links to the other pages in the LMS. This way students could go to this page, and complete all of the activities, readings, etc.

3. Next you should make yourself available online for the period of the day that you normally teach. For this you can use Google Hangouts, Cranium Café from Conexed, Skype or any other synchronous conferencing tool. If you are going to use this synchronous time as your regular class, be sure to record it if you can so that students can go back to it later. Also, those that do not have good internet can go back later and download the recording and listen to it. I would also provide additional office hours for all students so you can be there to help them with any particular questions outside of class time.

4. Connecting students with other students! This is very important in online learning. Students who are used to being in a classroom enjoy the ability to get together and ask questions of their fellow classmates, especially if they are struggling with a particular topic. I would set up some groups in the LMS or using Google Hangouts, the What's Up app, GroupMe app or any other texting or video conferencing tool you have available. Most of these I mentioned are free for students. As the teacher, I would set up the account and add all of the students if you can. This does require a cell phone for most of these, so working with young children this would not be as advantageous, but middle school and high school students will work very well.

For elementary school students, you could set up these groups for the parents and monitor the groups so that you can step in and answer any questions that may arise.

5. Grading and feedback needs to be timely and just as personal as you would in the classroom. I recommend recording your feedback if you can or having a one-on-one video conference call with the student. During the video or call explain just as you would in class and demonstrate the needed outcome.

6. The biggest challenge for online learners is the self-discipline and self-motivation to access their online lessons and complete the tasks in a timely manner. It is a lot easier to say, "I'll get to it later." For elementary school children and older as well, parents or guardian need to nag, nag, nag, or direct students to do their work.

I would recommend using that same period of the day for each class to set up that time for the student to complete the work each day. This provides consistency and the mentality that this is still school and I must login and complete the work.

7. Making your courses engaging with technology. Here is a list of some technologies that can make your classes engaging, rigorous, and more inviting.

Top, easy-to-use technologies to help professors move online quickly, maintain rigor and engage students.

1. **Nearpod** — make your PowerPoints and Google Slides interactive with ease.

2. **Cranium Cafe** — ADA compliant video conferencing.

3. **Prezi** — creative, interactive presentations.

4. **SelfCAD** — fully featured, fully integrated, user- friendly, online 3d modeling application.

5. **Adobe Spark** — Professional looking graphics, web pages, and videos in minutes.

Administrative Advice for Parents and Teachers

Administrators who must lead the move to online learning for K–12 schools are in a position to calm fears and ensure parents and students that online learning is just as credible as face-to-face learning.

Parents who never participated in any kind of online learning may be fearful that the education and learning is not as good online as it would be in class. This is just not true. Here are some studies that you can read and quote to parents and students that online learning is just as rigorous and engaging as classroom learning.

1. **National American Council for Online Learning K–12 Primer** — This is a comprehensive report on everything K–12 online learning. It provides common misconceptions of parents, administrators and teachers for online learning as well as provides concrete evidence that K–12 online learning outcomes are as good if not better than face-to-face courses. Version 2 is updated and supplies the latest in technology, success stories and tips for going online in K–12.

2. **Why K–12 online learning isn't really revolutionizing learning**. This article from the Washington Post talks about how online learning has been around for a long time. It tackles the misconception that online learning is not as good as classroom learning.

3. **7 Myths about Online Education** — This article in US News talks about online learning and the myths about online learning. It covers everything from online learning is easier to the quality of online courses is less.

Some issues that need to be discussed for administrators and principals is how to serve students in rural, lower socio-economic areas who may not have access to the internet. Not all rural areas have good coverage and some parents in disadvantaged areas in rural communities may not have

computers or access to the internet. This is a very tough situation for all. How do you serve these individuals?

1. Some rural libraries have internet access. For this reason, be sure that your courses can be downloaded by parents (who can usually access the internet from the parking lot) to provide lessons to their students. You should also make sure that if you have a lot of these students that they are able to complete assignments without the use of the internet (send books home) and be considerate of allowing these students to submit their coursework. Panera, Walmart, Starbucks also have internet and you can access it in most cases from the parking lot.

2. Provide students with emergency ChromeBooks if they do not have access to computers. Most schools are able to get ChromeBooks or have ChromeBooks for use in the classroom. Be sure that students can take these home for access to the online courses. If you do not have Chrome Books, you may be able to find a local non-profit organization or a doner who can provide ChromeBooks to disadvantaged students. I believe as the Coronavirus crisis continues, you will see organizations like Google and Microsoft and others provide free or discounted access to computers as long as parents can show need.

3. Hold virtual conference video or audio calls for parents to have access to you and faculty for questions and support and make sure that your district is able to support technical calls from students to help them access technology. Most cloud-based technology support is available online but having a person in your school to answer some technical questions can be advantageous.

Last, just be calm. Know that you and your teachers are not in this along. There are organizations out there that can help you with this very difficult situation. I suggest some of the following organizations that I am a member of can certainly find you the support and help you need. Here is a list:

1. **The Online Learning Consortium** — they have resources and individuals you can rely on to help you scale up quickly and provide you with free resources your teachers can use immediately.

2. **University Professional and Continuing Education Association** — can also give you access to great resources and professionals who can help you get online immediately.

3. **The Aurora Institute (formerly iNACOL)** — has tremendous resources, including broadband information and resources to go online.

4. **The United States Distance Learning Association** — has a K–12 option with resources and help for any professor or teacher in online education and those just converting their courses.

Please feel free to also reach out to me and my organization at **francis.edu/worldwide** , we have courses, programs and advice to get you through this difficult time. Follow us on Facebook for the latest tips and tricks to go online quickly.

About the Author

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