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| Subject: <i>Creating a Positive Virtual Culture & Climate: Remote Instruction Guidance</i> | Legal Reference: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• None |
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This Technical Advisory continues the New Hampshire Department of Education’s communication regarding the provision of remote instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This technical advisory gives a brief overview of universal strategies to support student wellness and direct access to strategies, resources and information to support local school districts, educators, and families.

What is Student Wellness?

Student wellness is the recognition by schools, districts, and educational professionals that there are many factors that impact a student’s academic attainment. It is an approach that focuses on supporting the whole child. The dimensions of wellness include: Emotional, Personal, Intellectual, Physical, Environmental, Occupational, and Social factors.

Over the past several years, many NH school districts have begun to support student wellness through the development of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Behavioral Health and Wellness (MTSS-B). MTSS-B is a process by which these districts, in partnership with students, families, and other community providers, organize teams to analyze community data and make a plan to identify, install, and evaluate strategies to support the student body.

Student Wellness and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health response are likely to have a major impact on the strategies, supports, and programs developed within local MTSS-B processes and frameworks. An orientation to remote instruction may result in lost access and availability of services and supports. In addition, the existence of the pandemic itself may increase the need for such services and supports.

The New Hampshire Department of Education’s Bureau of Student Wellness, Office of Social and Emotional Wellness (OSEW), seeks to provide resources and technical assistance to school districts to work collaboratively with their community to respond to the needs of students through MTSS-B. The following information is intended to support local MTSS-B processes and structures. Because MTSS-B is a locally driven process and framework, there is no one size fits all approach and this information may be taken in whole or in part based on the identified needs of each community.

Resources and Information

Creating a positive virtual culture and climate will be key to achieving positive outcomes during remote instruction. Once created, the positive virtual culture and climate will ease the transition back to an inperson learning model and support a sustained improvement in the classroom. The following are meant to be simple, easy to use strategies for administrator and classroom educators:

Presence

Be present virtually. Be available virtually.

Your calm and consistent virtual presence will reduce student and parent anxiety more than anything else.

Examples of your presence might include:

- Write a reassuring daily group email to students and another to parents.

- If possible, schedule brief daily live sessions with students (such as Zoom, or WebEx)
- Write a reassuring daily email to individual students with special needs and their parents.
- If applicable, schedule brief live sessions (Zoom, phone, live chat) with specific students and their parents.
- If your school has an LMS (Learning Management System such as Google Classroom, Moodle, Blackboard or Canvas), schedule regular times when you be online and available to respond to students and parents.

Lead the Way with Clear Communication

Set the tone. Be positive and friendly. You might not feel confident, and you will probably not have all the answers, but students and parents will be looking to you for guidance. Your clear communication will reduce anxiety, confusion and panic.

Examples of this might include:

- Communicate daily at regular times with a consistent message of assurance. For example, send a morning and evening message to students, and another message to parents.
- Let students and parents know how you want them to communicate with you. For example, do you prefer email, scheduled phone calls, open phone calls at specifically set hours?
- What is your communication response time? Let students and parents know when they can expect to hear from you, and how you will be communicating with them.
- If you don't have an answer, it's okay to let students and parents know that you don't have an answer but that you will get back to them in a specified amount of time.
- Have the contact information of essential staff at hand in case you need them.

Exemplify Positive Remote Classroom Behavior

Increase positive online behavior and reduce the likelihood of virtual bullying. Give students age appropriate netiquette guidelines. There are many examples available online. If appropriate, have them sign and agree to these terms. Let them know the consequences of online bad behavior and bullying.

Set Clear Expectations

Create a structured approach. If students know what to expect, they will feel less anxiety, confusion and stress and they will be more able to focus on academic work. Be clear with assignment descriptions, and due dates, and let students know how they will submit assignments to you as well as how and when they will receive your feedback. Decide how you want to structure the next several weeks and be consistent in application. If possible, determine a school wide, or grade wide approach. For example, a weekly structure is most intuitive.

Content Management

Remember, students who know what to expect will be able to focus on their work. They will feel happier, and more relaxed.

Create a folder (digital if possible) with the approximated length of time it will take them to complete each task.

- Daily or Weekly Readings
- Daily or Weekly Videos

- Additional supplemental materials students will need
- Daily or Weekly Activities
- Daily or Weekly Assignments
- Daily or Weekly Virtual Discussion Questions
- Daily or Weekly Tests/Quizzes
- Daily or weekly Group Work

Encourage Consistent Student Schedules at Home

Reduce stress, anxiety and confusion by encouraging students and parents come up with a regular schedule for their day. There are a lot of daily planning tools available online for “home schooled” children. Encourage diverse parents to find one that works for their homes. If possible, keep schedules consistent with the school day. Built in times for breaks, free time, exercise and play, should be kept in mind. Having consistently structured and predictable days is important for mental health.

Have a backup Plan for Technology down time

Have a backup plan for technology failure. Let students and parents know what they should do when technology fails. Write a statement about technology failure, and send it to students and parents in advance. For example, *“In the event that your child is not able to access the internet, and complete the work, please don’t worry. Send me an email, or call me at xxx.xxxx as soon as you are able to, and we will create an alternate plan”*.

Build in Student “fun” Activities

Create age appropriate virtual places for students to connect and enjoy. Students don’t want to feel isolated, so encourage parents to find safe and secure ways for their children to connect. For example, face time with a trusted friend, or dress up day. You know best what your students like to do to feel connected with their friends.

Consider Your Self Care

You will feel better if you have a structured plan in place. Create a daily schedule for yourself building in specific times for email, grading, planning, communication, breaks, lunch, fresh air, connection to your peers. Include time for your family and pets, and other activities that make you feel whole. Establish times when you won’t be working. A regular schedule that is designed to support your entire self. Remember: you don’t need to be an expert in remote education. Everyone is learning. It is okay not to have all the answers. We are all in this together.

For questions related to this Technical Advisory, please contact:

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