BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ONLINE

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A LETTER TO TEACHERS FROM THE HEAD OF LAUREL SPRINGS

March 2020
Dear Teachers,

As I sit here scrolling through social media and watching the news, all I can do is think of you. Teaching and learning with students is your calling—you have chosen the most noble profession. You love watching the magic of learning, and your heart breaks when your students are dealing with an issue at home. How do I know this? I taught within the walls of a school building for 20 years of my career.

As you try to work in this “new normal” for now, I am in awe that you can juggle kids at home while teaching your own students in a completely different way. You are trying new things, and I want you to know that the world surely admires your valiant efforts. Through this scary time, you are helping to bring normalcy to your students’ world. Even though you cannot possibly fit in 7 hours of instruction, the call, the text, the video, the email has made a difference for that child.

I have been feeling a bit guilty because nothing has changed for me. As Head of School of Laurel Springs School, an online private school, learning hasn’t changed. Our students live in all 50 states and over 90 countries, and they have not felt the disruption in learning that COVID-19 has posed for most of the world. My teachers are still teaching the way that they always have. Online schooling is what we have been doing for almost 30 years. Laurel Springs School was established in 1991, with its first online class in 1994. Can you imagine doing what you are doing now during the dial-up days?

As I was reflecting on the magnitude of what is happening in K-12 education, I wanted to figure out a way to help the teaching community. It dawned on me that Laurel Springs has just over 150 teachers and almost 30 years of distance learning experience as a school. So, I asked our expert teaching faculty—what are your best practices for teaching online? I was overwhelmed by the responses and goodwill from my team. I am excited to share with you a guide to help with working remotely, communicating with students and families, and the best tips and resources for lower, middle, and upper school.

I hope that you find this information useful and share it with your colleagues. Feel free to pass it on and share—we are all in this together. As a parent, teacher, and leader, I appreciate you and all of the wonderfully creative things you are doing to do what you do best: TEACHING.

Please feel free to contact me for any additional support!

Warmest regards,

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GENERAL REMOTE WORK TIPS

DESIGNATE A WORK AREA

► As much as possible, find an area in your home with good lighting, comfortable seating, strong internet connection, and as few distractions as possible.

SET BOUNDARIES TO PREVENT GETTING OVERWHENMED OR BURNED OUT

► 20-20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, look up from your screen at something that is 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
► Every 30 minutes, take a stretch by your workstation.
► Every 60 minutes, walk around, get water, and take a longer mental break. Your eyes need to be away from a screen for a few moments.
► Eat meals away from the computer and workspace if possible.

CREATE A SCHEDULE

► Plan your day, but allow for adjustments. For example, each day, you will want to check your email and respond, look for items to grade or provide feedback, and plan for the lessons for the day/week.
► Keep your morning routine for getting ready for work. Set an alarm. Put on work clothes, etc.
► Communicate expectations with your spouse/family while you work.
► Designate times that you can be available Monday–Friday for parents and students to be able to hop in and ask questions about assignments. Zoom and Google Hangouts are great free tools for this!

20-20-20 Rule

Every 20 minutes, look up from your screen at something that is 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
GENERAL WAYS OF COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

SET UP PROFESSIONAL CHANNELS AND EXPECTATIONS

► Before embarking on any virtual education endeavor, take the time to "scrub" your social media presence through sites such as Facebook and Instagram. It's easy to forget how savvy our kids are. They can find posts, status updates, and those old college photos using loophole methods that we might not even know. The separation between personal communication and "official" channels is definitely a good idea.

► Create a separate phone number (Google Voice) for professional interactions.

► Be open to various forms of communication: Zoom, Google Meet/Hangouts, phone, text, and email. However, you must be clear about when you are available for office hours and set appropriate boundaries. For example, create “do not disturb” parameters in overnight hours.

► Create a schedule choosing specific times to respond to emails or messages at regular intervals during a day (for example 9am and 3pm), so you can focus on other tasks without feeling the need to answer every email immediately. Respond to messages within a 24-hour period.

► Don’t assume families know how to use email, chat, Skype, Voice, or other online tools, and clearly outline your expectations. Cover the following topics with students and parents, using video to explain whenever possible:

► Office hours, as well as how to connect with you during those times.

► Your policy about technical difficulties and any tech tips you have.

► How to submit assignments (drop boxes).

► How to use Google Docs (or other software).

► How to find their grades in the grade book or how they will receive and track feedback and scores on their work. Do not show specific students or their grades in your demonstration.
GENERAL WAYS OF COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

CREATE A PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

► Try to make an initial contact via phone call or virtual office meeting to establish a human connection.

► Create a Google site (or other free resource) for a weekly newsletter. It’s super simple to create and update. Then, you can send the same link every week, and families have access to it as you make updates.

► Host a meeting in a virtual space (Google Meet). It’s a fun way for the student or family to see how you work and to offer suggestions for how to get organized when doing school from home.

► Maintain a positive attitude and try to understand the families’ situations.

► Don’t forget to send emails with praise before you ever have to send ones regarding class issues. Do not send only pace or concern emails—you can develop better rapport with families if communications begin positively.

► Make videos and share them with students. Videos allow students to pause, rewind, and replay as much as they need. Screencast O’Matic and Screencastify are great free resources to make simple videos. You can essentially move through a PowerPoint presentation while the app records your screen and your verbal explanations.

► Think of sending fun tips for the students to stay active and learning, even during social distancing. They also love to see photos of your real life, too! Share how you are staying entertained during quarantine. Ask for them to send photos back, also!

► If you have a virtual classroom, set time aside for “Lunch with your teacher!” Younger kids love this, and it motivates them to connect with you and peers.

MAINTAIN REGULAR COMMUNICATION

► Create a Google doc or spreadsheet with all your students’ information. Make a column listing the last time you spoke/communicated. This is great to see who needs a check-in at a glance.

► Document, document, document. The more you stay on top of your “log” or notes, the more you will have to jog your memory for future conversations.

► Families love to hear from you. Schedule times that you will reach out to families both as a group and as individual students. They want to hear progress updates, tips for how to work through assignments, and additional sites they can use for practice.
GENERAL WAYS OF COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

SECURE AND STREAMLINE SYSTEMS

▶ Do not leave messages on answering machines or text specific information to parents, guardians, or students that contain personal information, such as grades. It is so easy to forget this! Instead, ask them to call you back so you can discuss the grade if they have a question after looking at the online grade book.

▶ Use the Bcc function to send emails to multiple students or families at once without compromising their personal information.

▶ Create templates for written communication so you do not have to recreate similar communications again and again. Personalize them with short phrases about the student.

▶ Clear directions are vital when communicating remotely. If you can present an example of how you would like something done via video or document, that’s the best—remember they can’t just raise a hand and ask a question. Use rubrics with measurable outcomes (how many examples you’d like to see, for instance).

▶ Remind 101 is a good resource for sending bulk, secure, text messages to students and families.

▶ Use Google Calendar to help students keep track for online work or synchronous meetings. You can go into Google Calendar and create a calendar for each of your subjects or classes, colorize it, and then share it with your students. They will get an invite and be able to see the calendar.

▶ In the calendar event descriptions, you can link to documents in your shared drive, videos, or online Google forms.

Fun Ways to Keep Students Engaged

Think of sending fun tips for the students to stay active and learning, even during social distancing. They also love to see photos of your real life, too! Share how you are staying entertained during quarantine. Ask for them to send photos back, also!
TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

▶ Be patient with yourself, your students, and parents! This may be a very new experience for everyone involved, so give yourself grace to adjust the amount of work you provide.

▶ Remember that parents may be working full-time. Completing homework may be difficult with this age group, so you may have varied levels of commitment to academics.

▶ When teaching online, don’t be afraid to show your face. Your students want to see you!

▶ Be engaging with bitmoji’s (Kids LOVE these), videos, and very few words on the page. Know what you’re going to say because if you just read a PowerPoint, they lose interest QUICK!

▶ Use https://safeyoutube.net for all internet video content to delete ads and other unwanted video advertising.

▶ Use www.vocaroo.com for voice recordings that you can send to all your students with general or personal feedback. Then they can hear corrections, which may be easier than reading them in an email.
Provide resources. Don’t over assign—when planning, consider what you would accomplish during the designated time on a regular day. Then, provide supplemental items for families that prefer to add more to fill their day. The fastest way to overwhelm students and families is to overassign early.

Be flexible. This is new for them, too!

Share feedback, tips, and tricks with them.

Encourage the student/family to create a daily schedule. Consider sharing your own schedule with them, or think about what your day would be like if you were still face to face. Help guide them in planning their day.

Allow them to take breaks. Encourage “recess and PE” times—consider leading them in some fun exercises using a web-cam resource like Zoom or Google Hangouts!

Give clear instructions for new online learning resources.

Have fun while learning and teaching! :)

Be Patient!

This may be a very new experience for everyone involved, so give yourself grace to adjust the amount of work you provide.
K-5 TEACHING TIPS AND RESOURCES

MULTI-SUBJECT

- Freerice
- Twinkl
- Ck-12
- Seesaw
- BrainPop JR and BrainPop a

MATH

- Prodigy
- Khan Academy Kids

READING

- Read Aloud Revival
- Book Creator
- Classroom Magazines - Scholastic
- Actors read books to kids

SCIENCE

- Sheppard Software

GENERAL

- Nearpod
- Kahoot
- Educational Shows on Netflix
- Museum Tours
- Virtual Field Trips
- Amazing Educational Resources
TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

Organize synchronous group check-ins or virtual meet-up sessions using Google Hangouts, Skype, or WhatsApp.

Set up weekly individual appointments when possible for student check-ins and ask questions.

Think about providing online “social hours” for students to drop in and chat with friends and instructors for no other purpose than to connect.

Support your students in creating a schedule for much-needed structure.

Also support them in scheduling in movement time—indoor or outdoor!

Create book lists that support the coursework and general book suggestions.

Share links to free sites that offer classic literature options online, such as Gutenberg or The Read Aloud Revival.

Send out Google forms to gather information about student needs, but also fun or silly topics to keep them entertained.

If on camera, make sure you are backing up to a wall. Decorate that wall as if you would your classroom—interesting and age-appropriate items.

Give yourself a break, always!

Schedule live meetings when your own children are napping, or whenever they will be independently occupied for a set amount of time.
RESOURCES FOR 6-8

- Use www.vocaroo.com for voice recordings that you can send to all your students with feedback personal or in general. Then they can hear corrections which may be easier than reading them in an email. Students can also record information and send it as homework as well.

GEOGRAPHY

- Interactive Maps

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Dogonews

SCIENCE

- Sheppard Software
- EpicWin
- FlipGrid

EASY AT-HOME SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS FOR ANY AGE!

- Rainbow Walking Water Science Experiment
- Science Activity: Lemon Volcano
- Scientific American: Make Your Own Lava
- Chemistry: Turn Milk Into Plastic
- Cool Science Experiment: Light Refraction
- Activity: Components of Blood
- Printable Life-Size Organs
- Life-Size Printable Skeleton
- Make a Cartesian Diver
9-12 TEACHING TIPS AND RESOURCES

GET INSPIRED

► Borrow inspiration from your peers! Just as in brick-and-mortar classrooms, there are amazingly innovative online teachers. Follow them on social media, bookmark their blogs, and make their innovations your own.
► Try not to get overwhelmed with the vast array of online tools—try to master one at a time.
► Take the time to go through lessons from start to finish. It is very important to know what we present and what we require of the students when assessing their knowledge.
► If applicable, offer virtual field trips. Here are a few resources:
  ► The Geo Show offered by Learn Around the World—Currently offering free shows with no registration required.
  ► Exploring By the Seat of Your Pants: Dozens of trips monthly with science, history and exploration in mind.
  ► Smithsonian Learning Lab: You can create your own virtual field trip.

EDTECH TOOLS TO TRY

► Khan Academy. You can create a classroom, have you students sign in with a code, and keep track of their progress!
► Google classroom. You can design assignments that students submit directly. You can even design multiple-choice quizzes (they have a security option that prevents students from clicking outside the browser page while the quiz is open). They automatically grade when the students submit their work.
► Create a YouTube Channel. Use the unlisted privacy setting for security. This means only people who have the URL can access the video!
► Flipgrid is great for recording video responses or demonstrations.
► Kahoot and EdPuzzle are helpful for reinforcing topics.
► Padlet can help organize thoughts and structure group work.
► Actively Learn is a way to take an article and incorporate text responses.
► Pear Deck can make your PowerPoints much more engaging for the students.
► Adobe Spark helps you create videos, lectures, and newsletters that are fun to watch or read.
► Video Maker https://lumen5.com/
► Time management can become an issue for students. Giving them a schedule is helpful. Here are helpful apps:
  ► https://www.rememberthemilk.com/
  ► http://www.rexbox.co.uk/epicwin/
RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT PANDEMICS—KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

- Pandemic Lesson Plan
- Pandemics: How Viruses Are Spread
- Epidemiology: Solve the Outbreak
- Best Instructional Videos on Pandemics
- Epidemics and Pandemics

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

- Math
  - Flipped Math
- Book resources
  - The Read Aloud Revival. This resource has both a website and a weekly podcast.
  - Classic literature and other topics at Open Learn University
- TED Talks Central. While not every episode might be student-friendly, these are an incredible resource for everything from writing to filmmaking to entrepreneurship. Definitely worth a bookmark!
- The Armchair Historian. While these videos do deal with heady historical topics, they’re also extremely well-made, fun to watch, and informative. Be sure to vet the content prior to sharing it accordingly, but it can be a huge enhancement for lessons ranging from English to History and all points in between.

FEEDBACK IN AN EXCLUSIVELY DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

- Send out a Google form to students asking if they prefer communication via text message or email. Ask if they are able to do their school work from home, and be prepared to work around their limitations.
- It is more difficult to clarify questions online. When appropriate, allow students to turn in rough drafts of their work. This way, they can see where they need to improve and amend their work accordingly.
- After grading work, always leave authentic feedback. Help students understand errors they have made in lower graded work, but always be positive and offer them help, so they can learn from mistakes. Also, use peer-to-peer interaction strategies, such as chat rooms or discussion boards. Students can learn a great deal from each other in a well-developed online format.
SCHOOL COUNSELING TIPS AND RESOURCES

TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

▶ Copy parents on all email communications. To help with the lack of familiar, face-to-face contact, create a professional Skype username and offer to meet with students via Skype during school hours.

▶ Reach out to colleges and see if they are ok with you emailing official documents for students or submitting in another online format, rather than snail mail.

▶ Offer reassurance, but do not make promises. If you do not know the outcome or answer to something, be there for the student and let them know you will be looking into their question/concern and will let them know when you will follow up.

▶ Be sensitive to the fact that siblings will often share a computer/device or not have access until later in the day.

▶ Although it is more difficult to build rapport online, it is possible! Find time to check in regularly, ask questions, share about yourself. Anything to help the family feel your presence is great.

▶ Counseling/Social Resources

▷ 15 Must-Have Picture Books for Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

▷ Slideshow/Presentation Resources

▷ List of 20 Free Tools for Teachers

▶ Use Screen Cast-o-matic to make short videos outlining how to do almost anything. Many times a student will not do the work because he cannot find out HOW to complete it. Make a video of how to find an assignment, how to navigate your online presence, how to get to the gradebook, etc.

▶ Use Google Calendar to help students keep track for online work or synchronous meetings. You can go into Google Calendar and create a calendar for each of your subjects or classes, colorize it, and then share it with your students. They will get an invite and be able to see the calendar.

▶ In the calendar event descriptions, you can link to documents in your shared drive, videos, or online Google forms.

▶ Use an online scheduling software such as TimeTap, Calendly, SimplyBook or SetMore to help students and families set up times to meet with you. Since they aren't able to see a line at your "virtual door", this can help put students and their families at ease in knowing that they will have a set time to meet with you one on one, uninterrupted.