

Return to Learn: Launching Instruction for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten

A digital version of this document can be found at <https://sde.ok.gov/covid19-instruction-support>.

Table of Contents

Questions to Consider While Planning for Instruction	2
Standards and Pacing	2
Effective Instructional Routines	6
Blended or Distance Learning	7
Classroom Assessment	13
Social and Emotional Well-Being	14
Equity and Inclusion	16
Safety Considerations: Physical Environment and Materials.....	18
Ongoing Support for Instruction	21
Contact Information.....	22

Introduction

This guidance is designed to support educators and school administrators as they plan for various instructional delivery models for the 2020-21 school year. It has never been so important to take time and plan to attend to the goals of supporting students' academic growth, supporting students' and educators' social-emotional well-being, and creating a safe environment for all students and educators.

Teachers and schools should be responsive to their local context and student needs as they develop plans for the 2020-21 school year. Therefore, **please note that the guidance and resources provided in this document are not meant to be a directive or limitation**, but rather a tool. Additional guidance about the planning educators may undertake in preparation for this school year can be found beginning on page 29 of the [Return to Learn Oklahoma: A Framework for Reopening Schools](#). To provide feedback or make suggestions or requests for future guidance, please consider [completing this survey](#).

Please note that the guidance and resources provided in this document are not meant to be a directive or limitation, but rather a tool to support teachers and schools as they develop plans for the 2020-21 school year that are responsive to their local context and student needs.

p. 1

Questions to Consider While Planning for Instruction

The current events associated with COVID-19 bring a unique set of challenges to Pre-K and Kindergarten educators. Early childhood spaces can seem less conducive for social distancing, with children working closely together, sharing materials and physical space. Some educators are having to grapple with how to facilitate learning at home for students who are just beginning their journey of learning to read. Along with these challenges, though, are some opportunities to re-focus on essential aspects of early childhood instruction, including the importance of social-emotional learning, building and maintaining positive and healthy relationships, and developing a set of foundational skills that will support students throughout their educational journeys.

Learning in the early grades is centered around engaging activities that encourage play-based, hands-on development of skills and dispositions supported by strong relationships with teachers and peers. Regardless of the method of delivery, PreK and Kindergarten teachers should focus on using children's ages, experiences, capabilities, and interests to drive learning. The following sections provide additional guidance to use when planning for instruction this school year.

Standards and Pacing

What content and disciplinary skills should instruction focus on this year?

Essential Life Skills Focus

In a world that seems to be changing minute-by-minute, it will be more important than ever for students to emerge from the early grades with a set of life skills that help them navigate an evolving reality with ease. In her book [Mind in the Making](#), Ellen Galinsky outlines 7 important life skills to help children succeed. These life skills build students' executive function or the cognitive abilities that control and regulate most of what we do in day-to-day life. **Below you can learn more about each skill**, including what it is and why it is important now, along with ideas on how to help students develop that skill. All ideas and resources in italics are particularly conducive to distance learning when shared with caregivers.

Skill	Why it Matters Now	Ideas and Resources
Focus and Self-Control	Given that students may be learning in new environments,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use games, like "Red Light, Green Light" and "Simon Says" along with these other

Please note that the guidance and resources provided in this document are not meant to be a directive or limitation, but rather a tool to support teachers and schools as they develop plans for the 2020-21 school year that are responsive to their local context and student needs.

p. 2

	they must build the ability to self-regulate and pay attention even when conditions change.	examples from Pathway 2 Success . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Change the rules of games periodically so students have to pay close attention. ● Use student interest to drive learning so students are more motivated to pay attention. ● <i>Help students each develop a plan, perhaps for center time or a transition, and have them reflect after how they were able to stick to their plan.</i>
Perspective Taking	Emotions are running high for all in the current moment, so being able to “put yourself in someone else’s shoes” will help students navigate the emotions of others with empathy. This skill will also be helpful in conversations around equity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Have students reflect on the thoughts and feelings of the characters in books.</i> ● Encourage students to name their thoughts and feelings so they have the language to understand the thoughts and feelings of others. ● Conflict can result from a lack of perspective. When conflict does arise, help students pause and consider how the other person may be feeling.
Communication	Communication isn’t just about sharing ideas. It also includes the ability to read social cues and pick the most effective means of communication given the circumstance. Many students haven’t had much communication with people outside of their family for some time, so giving opportunities to communicate with diverse groups of people will be very important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Create spaces where students can have back-and-forth conversations with each other in creative ways while attending to social distancing.</i> ● <i>Allow students to choose how they want to communicate an idea. Perhaps they may want to draw or “write” a response, or record a video. Encourage them to consider their audience when choosing their method.</i> ● Use these tips from Scholastic to create a language-rich learning environment. ● <i>Help caregivers communicate with their students. Give them a list of questions to spark conversations.</i>
Making Connections	Making connections is essential to being able to make sense of the world. In a literal sense,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Practice letter and sound correspondence and number recognition and counting.</i> ● <i>Sorting games help build connections.</i>

	<p>students have to have this skill to see that symbols (like letters and numbers) stand for real things. This can also help with creativity and finding innovative solutions to problems, which is critically important in the current moment.</p>	<p><i>Change the categories to help expand thinking. Find examples from PreKinders here.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students make personal connections to the books they read by asking if similar things have ever happened in their lives.
Critical Thinking	<p>With the uncertainties and ever-changing information on Covid-19, adults are constantly analyzing information to make decisions. Critical thinking means seeking out new, reliable information to inform action. We want students to begin to feel empowered to make informed choices for themselves.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let students know that struggling to figure something out is okay! Model this for students, and don't jump in too quickly to save them when things get difficult. • <i>Imaginative play lets children practice this skill in a safe environment. Introduce a problem or challenge into their play for them to work on solving. For more on imaginative play and child development, review this article from Psychology Today.</i>
Taking on Challenges	<p>A student inclination may be to avoid or simply cope with challenges. Given that this year may be full of unforeseen challenges, we want students to feel ready to take them on instead of shying away.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Harvard Center on the Developing Child series on resiliency can provide more information and ideas for building resilience in students. • Focus more on effort than on achievement. • Start with scaffolds so students feel safe in taking on challenges, but remove them as they develop proficiency.
Self Directed, Engaged Learning	<p>This skill promotes students being able to be flexible in learning things in a new way, and they will need that given that things may change frequently this school year. Since learning may be more independent than in the past, developing a sense of curiosity and a love of learning will help students thrive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Open-ended play and exploration can encourage this, both at school and at home.</i> • <i>Have students set and work towards their own goals related to their learning.</i> • Encourage students to share what they have learned with their families, peers, and teachers.

Academic Focus

Even in this time of disruption, Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers need to continue to focus on laying a strong foundation of skills so students can thrive in the later grades. Inequity can grow when students aren't given the opportunity to access on-grade-level content, so educators need to work to make sure all students are making progress towards grade-level outcomes. Any academic instruction should continue to use the [Oklahoma Academic Standards](#) as the guidelines for what students are expected to know by the end of each grade.

Discipline	Focus	Additional Resources
English Language Arts	In reading, the primary focus for early childhood students should be oral language, phonological awareness (e.g., counting syllables in a spoken word, blending and segmenting onset and rime [c-at, s-and], and recognizing words that rhyme), and the alphabetic principle (identifying the names and sounds of letters). Listening to various types of text and responding orally, through drawings, or other types of play help students develop familiarity with the language of school, develop background knowledge and vocabulary, and provide opportunities for students to listen and discuss topics of interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming Soon: Return to Learn: Launching Instruction for Foundational Literacy available at https://sde.ok.gov/covid19-instruction-support. • What Works Clearinghouse and Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guide: Foundation Skills to Support Reading for Understanding • Pre-K ELA Family Guide • Kindergarten ELA Family Guide
Math	For early learners, math instruction needs to be diverse, covering numbers and operations, but also geometry, measurements, patterns, and data analysis. These early math concepts must be taught following a developmental progression, meaning that skills build and expand over time. This means skills often spiral, being frequently revisited and practiced as students build proficiency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Works Clearinghouse and Institute of Education Sciences Practice Guide: Teaching Math to Young Children • Pre-K and Kindergarten Family Guides • Free and Open lessons/units for Kindergarten through the Oklahoma Math Curriculum Frameworks

Science and Social Studies	<p>In Pre-K and K, authentic literacy skills can be practiced through authentic teaching and learning of science and social studies. Develop units of study that allow students to apply the skills they are learning to study the world around them, engaging in noticing and wondering through play-based investigations, and asking questions to understand themselves and others for social studies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Early Science Initiative on Facebook • Pre-K and Kindergarten Family Guides for Science • Pre-K and Kindergarten Family Guides for Social Studies
-----------------------------------	--	---

Effective Instructional Routines

What practices can support student learning, whether in-person or distance learning?

Importance of Schedule and Routine

Having a schedule and predictable routines benefit young children in several ways. It allows them to feel secure, know and be able to better meet expectations, and result in higher rates of engagement ([CSEFEL, 2007](#)). Young children can sometimes feel out of control in situations, especially in our current environment, but knowing what to expect can help them feel a sense of control they may crave. Starting from the first day of school, aim to build in some predictable routines for students. Given the variety of learning models students will experience this year, the predictability may not be the same every day or as detailed as we would like, but even having certain things scheduled on certain days of the week can help. Having a daily or weekly routine also ensures that all essential learning goals are covered. Here are a few things to consider:

- If young students are doing any significant portion of learning at home, consider working with families and caregivers to help them establish learning schedules and routines at home.
- Provide examples of what a learning day could look like, but stress that each family or caregiver will need to make decisions about what works best for them.
- If schedules and routines need to change, try to prepare students ahead of time. If that is not possible, explain what is happening and why to ease student stress.
 - **Resource:** [This article from EdSurge](#) includes further information about keeping a school rhythm and routine for young children at home.

Reusable Instructional Routines

Just as children crave predictability in their schedule, they also like it in their activities as well. When a learning routine is familiar, children feel safe to challenge themselves with more difficult content. These types of routines are very common in early childhood classrooms, but this year it will be important to teach the routine early and often so it can be utilized in whatever learning format becomes necessary.

- **For example**, you may create a routine for practicing letter-sound correspondence. Maybe this includes sharing a visual of the letter, having students say the sound, a word starting with that letter, and a hand motion to go along.

Reading Rockets has researched based examples for [alphabet matching](#) and [phonological awareness](#) and you can find [examples of math routines at this Teaching Channel Blog Post](#). [Notice and Wonder](#) is a routine that is commonly found in math and science but could be used to spark learning in almost any content area.

NOTE: For specific guidance related to Special Education and English Language Learner instruction, visit the [OSDE Office of Special Education](#) and [Office of English Language Learner websites](#).

Blended or Distance Learning

How can I adapt my instruction for blended or distance learning approaches?

Some schools are already planning to offer students opportunities to engage in blended or distance learning for a semester or the full school year. When planning for long-term blended or distance learning models, instructional planning considerations above should be leveraged.

For districts using the in-person model, schools and teachers should consider developing week-long distance learning units that can be easily deployed if the need arises. Effective instructional routines can be used with in-person and distance learning environments, and even taught to families and caregivers so they can engage their students in them if learning has to happen at home. Think about these key shifts between in-person and distance learning as you plan:

Key Shifts from In-Person to Distance Learning

In-Person Learning	Distance Learning
Learning happens in school with consistent access to resources and materials	Learning happens in a variety of physical environments with varied access to resources and materials
A common, defined schedule	Schedules dependent on family needs
Teacher-facilitated instruction	Teacher-directed, caregiver-facilitated instruction
Common daily class periods	Regular synchronous check-ins and opportunities for independent learning with caregivers
Classroom community built during circle time, centers, recess, and other parts of the day	Classroom community built through virtual interactions with teachers and peers
Play-based learning with teacher-facilitated activities and centers	Play-based learning with materials families have available

For general guidance on distance learning, reference the [OSDE document Early Childhood Distance Learning PK-K](#).

As previously mentioned, Pre-K and Kindergarten students spending a substantial amount of their learning time away from a physical school building presents some unique challenges and may look substantially different than other elementary grade levels. The following are some suggestions to consider when planning for blended or distance learning for young children.

- Students may not be proficient with technology tools. If blended, consider spending some of your in-person time helping students learn to navigate the most important tools you will want them to use at home.
- Significant screen time may not be in a child's best interest. Consider the [research](#) on technology use in the early grades, and plan for at-home learning accordingly.
- Not all students have access to technology at home, and if there are more children than devices, younger students are less likely to be prioritized for device usage. Create non-technology-based alternatives for these scenarios.

- Consider making materials available for families to pick up and use at home. [Take-Home Learning Bags](#) are a great example of helping families provide enriching, play-based learning. Be sure to follow all appropriate safety protocols when collecting or distributing materials.
- Help parents make the most of the materials they have at home. [Prop Boxes](#), similar to classroom learning centers, can be a great tool for encouraging exploration and open-ended play.
- Making videos specifically for families and caregivers can be even more effective than videos made for students. In videos for families and caregivers, you can teach them instructional routines, provide overviews of academic content and concepts, or share any other pertinent information that they can view at any time.
- Interacting with others and building relationships is an important part of a Pre-K or Kindergarten classroom. Where you can, try to build opportunities for students to connect. Consider doing some virtual instruction in small groups where students can interact with you and with each other.
- Check-in with families and caregivers to see how they are doing and how to make blended or distance learning work better for them. There are likely to be many unforeseen challenges, but open lines of communications and ample opportunities for them to provide feedback can make a better experience for all.
- As you create plans, please consider that children can focus for about 2-5 minutes times the year of their age. This means a 4-year-old has an attention span of about 8-20 minutes if they are interested in what they are being asked to pay attention to.

The following table includes some parts of the day that are often found in Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms, what they are, and how they might be adjusted for distance learning. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list of everything that may need to be part of a distance learning plan, nor do all of the following necessarily need to be in your specific plan. Many of the parts of the day below provide an example of how to provide that instruction synchronously, but that does not mean it is always the preferred method of delivery.

Keep in mind, synchronous learning can be difficult for families, especially with multiple students schooling from home and/or working caregivers. As always, defer to your school and district guidance for expectations on distance learning.

Part of the Day	Definition	Options for Distance Learning
Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting is a time to set the tone for the day, establish and review the schedule, and build classroom community. At-home morning meetings should, as much as is possible, align with what students are used to in-person to maintain continuity in the student experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take the meeting online by having students join a live video call at the same time each morning. Post a video each morning for students to watch as they start their day. Teaching Little Leaders explains how she does it in this blog post. Share a morning message (either through a digital platform, email, social media post, text message, or distributed paper packet) for families to read to students that require some type of interaction, like responding to a question of the day with a drawing. Edutopia provides examples of morning messages for each day of the week.
Read Aloud	Read alouds help students develop their language skills, concepts of print, ability to listen and pay attention, reading comprehension, and love of reading and books. They are an essential part of an early childhood classroom.	<p>NOTE: Please ensure you are following copyright guidelines. The American Association of School Librarians has helpful tips and information about protecting intellectual property rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live read alouds enable students to engage with the teacher and each other. Consider following the Repeated Interactive Read Aloud model from Reading Rockets. Record yourself doing read alouds, or have students view read alouds from a resource like Storyline Online. Consider having students respond to the read aloud with a follow-up activity or questions caregivers can ask following the viewing. Support and encourage families to have read alouds with students. Reading Rockets provides reading tips for families of Pre-K and Kindergarten students in English, Spanish, and 9 other languages. Connect families with resources like their local library to provide

		access to a wider selection of books.
Phonics and Phonological Awareness	Early readers need explicit and systematic phonics and phonological awareness instruction. You can see more of the focus for Pre-K and Kindergarten in the Academic Focus section of this document. For more details on the skills that form the foundations for learning to read, visit Read Naturally's information on the essential components of reading .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having students online at the same time for phonics and phonological awareness instruction may not be necessary, but if so, teach and use routines that are familiar to students. • Use pre-recorded videos of yourself or videos found online (like these examples of both from Sparkling in Second). • Free online tools like Starfall or other personalized online learning platforms available through your district can be utilized to reinforce concepts. • Provide hands-on activities for families to do with students. The Florida Center for Reading Research has wonderful lessons and activities for Pre-K and Kindergarten. You may consider creating videos geared towards families and caregivers showing them how to complete the activity or play a learning game with students.
Centers and Learning Stations	Play is an active form of learning that involves the whole self, so centers are the perfect opportunity to support academic and social-emotional learning. This type of hands-on learning and exploration helps a child's brain expand neural pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help families understand more about structured vs. unstructured play and how both can benefit young children. • Provide resources and examples (like the Learning Bags and Prop Boxes mentioned in the section above) when appropriate. • Encourage families and caregivers to have "center" time built into their daily routines. • Families may be struggling to balance at-home learning with other demands, and allowing space for independent play and activities can benefit the student and their caregivers. • Share ideas for fine motor development, like the ones found here.
Math	In a Pre-K or Kindergarten class, foundational math skills are often embedded in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you choose to do a live math lesson, keep it "short and sweet." Consider using movement to keep students engaged.

Please note that the guidance and resources provided in this document are not meant to be a directive or limitation, but rather a tool to support teachers and schools as they develop plans for the 2020-21 school year that are responsive to their local context and student needs.

	various parts of the day, like calendar time for example. Students need routine exposure and ample opportunities to explore mathematical concepts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online games, like these from PBS Kids, can reinforce math concepts for students. Khan Academy also has early math digital content. Use Learning Menus for math activities that allow students to get hands-on practice while fitting into their schedule. See a sample for Pre-K and Kindergarten here.
Science/ Social Studies	One of the most effective ways of teaching young students about the world around them is by using themed units of study. Students can engage the topics through literature, using math skills, and while developing their social-emotional competencies during play and exploration time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a theme with a connection to science or social studies (for example, the weather or community helpers). Have your question of the day, read aloud, centers/play suggestions, and math activities connect to this theme. Use technology to give access to science and social studies topics. Virtual field trips, games, and videos are an easy way to incorporate technology into distance learning. Ask students to explore their environment. Teaching these subjects in the early grades is all about developing curiosity and the ability to better understand the world around us. OSDE provides an Introduction to Science Inquiry at Home for PreK and Kindergarten that guides families and caregivers on how to set up these experiences for students.
Recess and Physical Activity	The American Academy of Pediatrics states that recess has “cognitive, social, emotional, and physical benefits” (AAP, 2013). Giving students a break from learning, even at home, can make the learning time more effective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share with families the importance of recess, and encourage them to make it a part of their daily schedule. Give families ideas for recess time. This list of screen-free gross motor development has options for inside and outside to account for weather.

○

Launching Instruction with Digital Tools

For more guidance for effectively implementing virtual instruction, blended learning, or creating digital variations of instruction to enact social distancing, the Return to Learn: Launching Instruction with Digital Tools will be available soon at <https://sde.ok.gov/covid19-instruction-support>. The guidance is organized around the following principles to support all learners:

- select appropriate digital tools and implement with care,
- create clear and effective communication strategies,
- build and maintain community, and
- empower student choice.

Classroom Assessment

How will students be provided opportunities to showcase their learning and for teachers to provide feedback to students on their learning?

The goal of assessment in any classroom should be to better understand where a student is in their current learning so the teacher can make the most appropriate instructional choices. In early childhood classrooms, this often means using a combination of observation, analysis of student work, and more formal one-on-one assessments to gauge where each student is. In most traditional learning scenarios this fall, assessment will continue as it has in the past. Some minor adjustments may need to be taken to keep a safe distance and ensure the disinfecting of any materials used. Learn more about how to use formative assessment effectively in an early childhood classroom by reviewing [this video from Regional Education Laboratory-Southwest \(REL-SW\)](#).

Early childhood assessment looks very different, though, in a blended or distance learning scenario. Below are some considerations for collecting information about students who are spending a significant amount of their learning time away from a physical school building. **Please look to your school or district leadership for additional information on assessment expectations during distance learning.**

How can families and caregivers be partners in collecting information about student learning?

- There should be two-way communication between the teacher and families or caregivers. Offer multiple modes of communication (phone, video call, texting, email, etc.) and use them frequently.

- Ask families to share thoughts and insights on their student's development. Using open-ended questions and prompts (e.g., describe your child's play) can help give a more complete picture of the skills and progress students are exhibiting at home.
- Ask, **but do not expect**, families to send pictures or recordings documenting student work and play.
- Teach families and caregivers how to give simple assessments (e.g., letter name or number recognition).

How can teachers find and get time to meet with students?

- Consider scheduling online appointments with students to give important assessments. Keep the times very short, as it can be hard to keep a young student's attention in a virtual setting.
- Use the time you have purposefully. Prioritize the most time-consuming assessments first to ensure they are completed.
- Allow families and caregivers to get involved. Recruit them to give an assessment while you watch or listen.

Student Social-Emotional Learning and Educator Well-Being

How can instruction in this discipline support social-emotional learning for students?

Students will return to school this fall amid two profound crises: an unprecedented global pandemic and social upheaval as the nation reckons with its legacy of systemic racial oppression. For this reason, as educators plan for a strong start to the 2020-21 school year, it will be critical to prioritize well-being and connection, which research shows are prerequisites to effective teaching and learning.

NOTE: Consider incorporating [sample teaching activities](#) provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to support core competencies of social-emotional learning for students this year.

[The Minnesota Department of Education provides examples](#) of how social-emotional student learning competencies can be integrated across subject areas. Here are a few examples:

- Have students draw pictures of faces showing different emotions and display pictures in the room or in a virtual platform, which connects to English Language Arts standards for Speaking and Listening.

- Help students with strategies for taking turns during conversations and class discussions, which connects to demonstrating civics skills in social studies.

What supports are available for families and caregivers?

While educators are trained in the specific skills and strategies that help promote social-emotional learning, families and caregivers will likely need some additional support to prioritize this kind of learning at home. CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) has [resources](#), including videos about social-emotional learning designed for caregivers available in English and Spanish to share with families. If we hope to help families build their capacity to promote social-emotional learning at home, it is important to keep the conversation going throughout the year. Sharing timely resources, like [these from The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#) and [this REL document on Supporting Young Children's Learning and Well-Being at Home](#), can spark an ongoing dialogue between teachers and families. Families will likely be bombarded with information on logistics and structure of learning in the early weeks, so sharing these once students have settled into their learning routine may garner more attention.

- Consider using technology, like a text through [Remind](#) or on a [classroom social media page](#), so parents have easy access to the materials.
- Follow up with a phone call or video conversation, or bring groups of caregivers together to discuss and answer questions.

NOTE: Consider sharing these documents with families of students: [Self-Care for Parents and Caregivers](#) | [Guidance for Distance Learning Environment: Helpful Tips for Families](#) | [Family Guide to Positive Behavior in Distance Learning Environments](#).

What are ways to ensure regular self-care as an educator?

Before teachers can be expected to provide healthy and safe environments for students, it is important that they also take time to attend to their personal care and well-being. Doing a personal check-in using the questions below can be a good place to start.

- How am I taking care of my physical needs, including getting enough sleep, exercise, and nutrition?
- Do I have a routine? If so, which parts of the routine are working well, and which could be improved? If not, how can I use a routine to reduce stress and encourage healthy behaviors?
- Do I have a sense of balance between work and other life demands? How can I take steps to “turn off” work and spend time doing other things that bring joy?

- Am I staying connected with friends and family? How do I need to make adjustments given current limitations?

Here are a few additional resources to support teacher well-being at this time:

- [Self-Care for Teachers and Educational Professionals](#)
- Free interactive sessions from [Pure Edge](#), to support self-care.
- [Social-Emotional Toolkit for Educators](#)

How can students experiencing chronic stress be supported?

Students are going to have a variety of reactions to the realities of 2020, largely based on where they are in their development and the kind of coping mechanisms they possess. For some, a sudden and drastic change in routine or the anxiety and fear their caregivers are experiencing can lead to a loss of previously acquired developmental skills. This may manifest in the way children are able to separate from their caregivers, play and interact with others, and even toilet or sleep ([NCTSN, p. 1](#)). Here are a few examples of how to create a safe space for students who may be experiencing trauma:

- Leverage the [SEL Hacks](#) and [read this blog](#) showing how to create a safe, nurturing, relationship-based environment for students both in-person or through distance learning.
- Encourage the student to verbalize their feelings. Helping them put their emotions into words can give them a sense of control in the situation.
- Provide [age-appropriate](#) and [factual information](#) to students, but try to focus on the positive and that [adults are working hard to keep them safe](#). Educators should also consider the effect the discussions have on students who may have experienced the effects of COVID-19 and other diseases in family and acquaintances. Caution should be generously applied in any case where such context may create discomfort or harm for any students.
- Consider reactions students may have to the pandemic and ways to support them ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)).
- Help students build connections, with you and with each other. This may be more challenging given the need for social distancing or distance learning, but caring connections with others is more important than ever. Edutopia has [some ideas for fostering a strong classroom community](#) in a virtual setting.
- Routine and predictability are important. If possible, try to communicate with children about any changes before they happen. Given potentially quick changes that may happen this year, explaining the changes as or after they happen can help students adjust as well.

- Explore [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Resource Guide for Trauma-Informed School Strategies During Covid-19](#). This document gives deeper insight into Covid-19 related trauma and tangible strategies for teachers and administrators.

Equity and Inclusion

What instructional practices support equity and access to quality instruction?

"Equity does not mean that every student should receive identical instruction; instead, it demands that reasonable and appropriate accommodations be made as needed to promote access and attainment for all students" ([NCTM 2000, p. 12](#)).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides a [Position Statement](#) that includes tangible steps for early childhood educators to take to promote equity (p. 7-8). In the chart below, you will find some practices to keep in mind given the current realities of returning to school amid the pandemic and the ongoing fight to reduce systemic racism.

More Equitable Practices	Less Equitable Practices
Making sure that students and families have what they need to access instruction or communication, and shifting practices where necessary to ensure access for all.	Deciding on one form of instructional delivery or parent communication and sticking to only that.
Providing all students grade-level learning, regardless of their starting points. All students are capable of progressing to the next grade level this fall and mastering that content.	Never giving students access to grade-level content because of the perceived deficits they entered this school year with.
Providing all students with materials and instruction that affirm their background and culture.	Using texts and other materials that are limited in their diversity and/or representation of cultures and experiences.
Offering multiple opportunities and methods for students to demonstrate their proficiencies.	Using only one form of assessment to measure student progress.

While it can be easy to dismiss Pre-K and Kindergarten students as “too young” to join the conversations about systemic racism happening all around them, research suggests that “children not

only recognize race from a very young age but also develop racial biases by ages three to five” ([PACE 2009, p. 1](#)). Educators of young children both must interrogate their own biases and help create spaces for anti-bias work in their classrooms.

Teacher Self-Reflection

- [Harvard’s Project Implicit](#) offers Implicit Association Tests for several topics, including race, gender, and even weight and religion. Participating in these assessments can give you insight into your own unconscious biases.
- Learn about the [Me/They/We strategy](#) for checking in on how biases might be playing out in responding to student behavior.
- Dig deeper into the research on bias in the classroom. The US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights released an [Early Learning Data Snapshot](#) in 2014 highlighting the disparities around retention and suspension rates related to race and gender.

Creating an Anti-Bias Early Childhood Classroom

- Don’t ignore differences in students. Instead, explore and celebrate student similarities and differences! [Teaching for Change](#) provides specific strategies for learning about physical differences in a productive way.
- Challenge traditional stereotypes. When you see associations that are negative (that girls aren’t strong, for example), help students understand why that association is incorrect. [This article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#) gives a great example of how this could look when students create a “no girls allowed” clubhouse.
- Use texts that represent diversity and help young children explore inequity.

Safety Considerations: Physical Environment and Supplies

Educators planning for in-person, blended and distance learning instructional delivery models should **always defer to the safety guidelines provided by your school or district**. As the Covid-19 situation continuously develops, also consult the current [Oklahoma Department of Health \(OSDH\)](#) and [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) health and safety guidelines.

Students working and playing together, as well as using hands-on materials regularly, is at the core of an early childhood classroom. Teachers may need to modify many traditional instructional practices to prevent the spread of viruses and other disease-causing organisms. The following early childhood classroom safety considerations are not intended to replace a district’s emergency or crisis safety plan and are not an exhaustive list of the health and safety needs to be considered.

Physical Learning Environment

Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms utilize a variety of classroom spaces: carpet, tables, centers, small group meeting areas, and sometimes sinks/drinking fountains and bathrooms. Often materials are shared between students. Some physical considerations:

- Think about spacing. Using visual cues, like tape on the floor, can be a helpful reminder for students to keep a safe distance. Spreading “airplane” arms while lining up or walking in the hall is another example of this.
- Utilize the outdoors as much as possible. Consider moving some carpet time activities, like read aloud, to an outdoor location when the weather allows.
- Handwashing and Drinking Fountains
 - Make washing hands a game. Have students sing a song, or put a stamp on their hand that they need to get off while washing. Have designated time for handwashing periodically throughout the day rather than relying on students to do it properly after using the bathroom. Immediately before using manipulatives or moving to a new physical space is a good time for this.
 - Consider having students use a cup or a water bottle over a communal water fountain. Students can fill their water bottles when they are doing their handwashing procedure.

Classroom Materials

- Student and Teacher Mask Usage
 - If feasible, have students attach their facemask to a lanyard they wear around their neck. This way it is easy for the mask to come off for eating and drinking without getting lost.
 - If possible, early childhood teachers should wear a facemask with a clear panel to allow students to see their mouths (and a face shield as appropriate). This can help in phonological awareness and phonics development, as well as building connections with the teacher.
- Try limiting the objects coming from home to school. If backpacks or other materials are completely necessary, cubbies and/or storage outside of the classroom may be easiest to prevent accidental contamination.
- Limit student material sharing as much as possible. Each student will likely need to have their own set of daily materials. For example, each student may need a pencil box with their own personal pencils, crayons, scissors, and glue stick.

- For other often used small manipulatives, like counters, pattern blocks, or playdough, separate them into individual zip-lock baggies and label with student names. Keep each student's belongings separated from those of others and in individually labeled containers, cubbies or areas.

Additional Considerations for In-Person Learning

Learning relies on the interaction between students and teachers and among students to construct knowledge and skills. Teachers may need to modify collaborative learning practices to maintain collaboration while minimizing risk.

- Considerations for Centers
 - Try making some centers portable, where students bring the materials to their desk/table instead of moving around the room.
 - Clustering students into small groups or “pods” that travel from center-to-center together can limit exposure.
 - Allow students to do center time in the morning and afternoon, choosing one center each time and sanitizing materials in between.
 - While it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that materials are properly sanitized, start teaching students how to clean off materials after they use them. This is an extra layer of protection and a healthy habit for students to be practicing.
 - Have a “CLEAN ME PLEASE” bucket. Students can place materials they have used in this bucket for disinfecting prior to another student using the item. The [CDC has guidelines for Cleaning and Disinfecting Community Facilities](#).
- Limit guests and visitors to the classroom while remaining mindful that parents and families play a vital role in their child's education; involve guest speakers through virtual means.
- Evaluate planned student activities for safety and student interactions but also their value for engaging students in meaningful thinking and learning. Consider alternatives that teach the same concepts and skills. Build in extra time for sanitizing activities.
- Include instruction that teaches the routines and procedures that students should use in the class and out-of-school. Consider the traffic flow when distributing materials and other movements. Minimize the number of students that need to move. Establish personal student practices such as wearing masks, washing hands, and sharing materials. Use signage that encourages the practices.

Additional Considerations for Blended or Distance Learning

The OSDE document [Early Childhood Distance Learning PK-K](#) provides general instruction recommendations for both digital and analog delivery methods. In addition, here are some specific items to consider.

- Safety considerations are paramount. Plan for anything that could go wrong, especially considering that the students might not have adult support and supervision. Document safety considerations in student materials, parent guidance, and teacher lesson plans.
- Be cautious about the handling of materials. Consider the hazards and safety precautions for sharp objects, heated objects, and breakable items that might be suggested for use in distance learning.

Ongoing Support for Instruction

OSDE will continue to provide ongoing support for instruction during the 2020-2021 academic year. Continue to check the [OSDE Early Childhood Website](#) and [sign up for the Early Childhood Newsletter](#) to see upcoming professional learning opportunities, virtual meetings, and additional instructional resources.

Professional Learning Opportunities

- [Tech Tool Tuesday Recordings](#)- Learn about different education technology tools for instruction.
- [EngageOK Sessions](#) - Access videos on various topics by going to the EngageOK website.
- [NAEYC Professional Development Resources](#) - Access online learning and webinars from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

OSDE Hosted Virtual Meetings

Join OSDE staff and fine arts teachers around the state for monthly professional learning opportunities during the 2020-21 school year.

Early Childhood Virtual Meetings

- Every 2nd Monday of each month, 3:30-4:30 p.m.
- Zoom information will be communicated through the #OKEarlyEd Newsletter. Subscribe [here!](#)

Social Media Connections

Facebook Communities

- [#OKEarlyEd](#)
- [#ELAOK Elementary](#)
- [#OKMath Elementary](#)
- [#OKSci Elementary](#)
- [#OKSS Elementary](#)

Twitter

- Use and search **#OKEarlyEd** to highlight and find early childhood resources for Oklahoma Educators.
- **@oksde** - OSDE Twitter Account

Contact Information

- **Lauren Jenks-Jones**, Director of Early Childhood, Office of Curriculum & Instruction
Lauren.Jenks-Jones@sde.ok.gov
- **Melissa Ahlgrim**, Director of Reading Sufficiency, Office of Curriculum & Instruction,
Melissa.Ahlgrim@sde.ok.gov
- **Deb Wade**, Director of Elementary English Language Arts, Office of Curriculum & Instruction,
Deb.Wade@sde.ok.gov
- **Susan Kirk**, Director of Elementary Math, Office of Curriculum & Instruction,
Susan.Kirk@sde.ok.gov
- **Brenda Beymer-Chapman**, Director of Social Studies, Office of Curriculum & Instruction,
Brenda.Chapman@sde.ok.gov
- **Heather Johnston**, Director of Science, Office of Curriculum & Instruction,
Heather.Johnston@sde.ok.gov