

Return to Learn: Launching Instruction with Digital Tools

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

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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 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 39 of the [Return to Learn Oklahoma: A Framework for Reopening Schools](#).

This guide provides considerations, links to resources, and ideas to support classroom teachers aimed at effectively implementing virtual instruction, blended learning, or to create digital variations of

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instruction to enact social distancing. The guidance is organized around the following principles to support all learners:

1. *select appropriate digital tools and implement with care,*
2. *create clear and effective communication strategies,*
3. *build and maintain community, and*
4. *empower student choice.*

To provide feedback or make suggestions or requests for future guidance, please consider [completing this survey](#).

Select the Appropriate Digital Tools and Implement with Care

How can we help to not overwhelm students, teachers, and families with digital tools?

Before we explore how to select digital tools to meet the learning needs of students and teachers, we should appreciate that selecting too many digital tools or implementing digital tools too quickly can overwhelm and frustrate teachers, students, and families alike. This frustration can be especially disheartening in times when technical support is not readily available as it might be in an in-person classroom setting. Recognizing that many users will need a lot of support to be successful, creating a clear plan for selecting and implementing technology tools will make for a smooth transition.

Consider the following scenario in which a teacher attempts to navigate the digital tools available to her to help enact a virtual version of her class:

1 I wasn't too stressed about going online this fall since I had been using Google Classroom for a while
2 now. But now we're learning a new system that has lessons and videos we're supposed to be able to
3 assign. I've made a playlist for students, but I'm not really sure how to assign it and check on
4 students' progress--not to mention how I'm supposed to find out if they even learned something from
5 it? I would have normally used Google Classroom to build a quick "check for understanding" quiz,
6 but I'm not quite sure how to do that in the new LMS. In the very short time I have with students
7 every other day, I tried to use the whiteboard feature in Zoom, but no one could even read my
8 handwriting! Maybe if I had a tablet and pen. Who do I even ask about that? When I used the virtual
9 graphing calculator, one of my students who has a vision disability struggled a lot. In class, it was
10 easy to support. I'm out of ideas right now. I tried Padlet, VoiceThread, and even tried to have
11 students create their slides in Google Docs. With only 30 minutes in each virtual class, there's barely
12 enough time to teach them how to use it, explain the activity, and actually do the activity. Worst of

13 all, I can barely remember where to look to find their work. It’s hard enough to have a successful
 14 virtual meeting. Taking attendance, making sure questions are addressed in the chatbox, and trying to
 15 make sure not everyone is talking at once is wearing me out!

Reflection: Take a moment to consider the teacher’s experience, and what the student experience might be, in this scenario.

1. What feels similar to experiences you or other teachers may experience in your school?
2. What processes might the school and teacher use to improve the teaching and learning experience?
3. How might better digital tool selection and implementation processes improve the student’s experience?

Creating a Staggered Release Schedule

To combat overwhelming students, teachers, and families, tools might be introduced in a staggered manner. Release schedules can reduce overloading instructional technology coaches and IT support staff who are providing resources for onboarding, training, and technical support. Keep in mind that some disciplines may need specialized digital tools in addition to the basics. For example, the following table provides a release schedule for digital tools over six weeks of school:

Digital Tool	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Email and Text Messages						
Zoom						
Google Suite (Docs and Slides)						
Flipgrid						
Padlet						
VoiceThread						

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How do we select digital tools that support instruction and are safe for students?

When digital tools are needed to support students as they make sense of and master disciplinary content, they must be carefully selected to ensure they are **safe** and **high quality**. Certainly, if a tool cannot be shown to protect students and align to [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA) and [Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule](#) (COPPA) requirements, it does not matter how effective it might be, it shouldn't be used.

Student Safety and Privacy

Before using any digital tool with students, check with school or district guidance to ensure the tool is or has been vetted for privacy and legal considerations. Many districts require tools to be vetted by the Information Technology or Education Technology department due to possible issues with privacy rights and usage requirements. For example, some tools require a minimum user-age; others may require access to student data and conflict with FERPA or COPPA requirements. If the specific tool you wish to use with students is not allowed by your district, ask them for possible alternatives.

- **Many tools have privacy ratings published at [Common Sense Privacy Evaluations](#).** These ratings may serve as a starting point for teachers or districts when determining whether certain digital tools are worth vetting further.

Note: Wherever possible in this document, links to digital tools will direct to [Common Sense Education](#) so that privacy reviews and other resources are more readily accessible.

- **To provide transparency and accountability, many schools share their district's approved digital tool list on their school websites** to show families and community members that such tools have been evaluated and approved. Often, the following characteristics are communicated in the digital tool list:
 - Suggested grade level
 - Hyperlink to the tool's terms of service
 - Hyperlink to the tool's privacy policy
 - Parent permission necessary
 - Tool evaluation (see sample review tool below) and the date it was last reviewed

Features of High-Quality Digital Tools

The following table outlines some features of high-quality digital tools that should be reviewed and understood before selection and implementation. The sample table that follows may be used as a template for selecting common digital tools across grades and subjects, and the results can be used to provide transparency and accountability as described in the [Student Safety and Privacy](#) section.

For each feature, a few guiding questions are posed to help educators consider the extent to which the digital tool **protects student privacy** and is **accessible, usable, and applicable to the instructional sequence**. The column on the right provides space for reviewers to add comments explaining how the tool is or is not responsive to the guiding questions.

Feature	Questions	Comments
Privacy and Student Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the tool have a privacy policy consistent with FERPA and COPPA? Does the tool require parental/caregiver consent? If a student or school license is not required, is the tool free or supported by student-facing advertising? 	
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the tool ensure accessibility for all learners? Consider ways in which the tool has built-in accessibility services or takes advantage of existing accessibility services on computer operating systems. 	
Usability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the tool provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and/or action expression (see Universal Design for Learning guidelines here)? Is the tool user friendly and easy to use? For more complex tools, are there student-facing guides or tutorials? Is the tool reliable or do reviews of the tool indicate users often experience technical issues? 	

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Applicability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there the ability to provide a strong connection between the tool and the content being taught? • Is the tool engaging for students? 	
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Create Clear and Effective Communication Strategies

How can we ensure students and families have a clear understanding of how to be successful in a blended or virtual learning environment?

As schools implement virtual or blended instruction, families and caregivers may be placed in roles to provide greater educational, and technology, support for their children. Students of all ages will find it difficult to manage new virtual platforms that require usernames and passwords, different user interfaces, and a level of organization quite beyond having a classroom folder or binder. With these challenges and the reality that students will be more or less unable to benefit from the consistent routines and immediate support of the classroom teacher to re-engage, course-correct, or re-learn routines, it is even more vital that teachers provide **frequent and consistent communication** to families.

Consider the following scenario in which a parent with multiple students at multiple schools attempts to navigate the blended or virtual learning expectations for their student:

1 As I’m working on our family’s schedule for the week, the teacher of my 4th grader sends an email
 2 outlining his required tasks for the week. There are ten 30-minute virtual classes he needs to attend,
 3 30-minutes of daily reading, and another two hours of “independent” work that will need a lot of
 4 support and direction from a parent. A text comes from the PE teacher with ideas for the weekly
 5 physical activity requirements that have to be logged in an activity tracker. The art teacher sent home
 6 a packet a couple of weeks ago with activities and a supply list; the Amazon order still hasn’t arrived,
 7 and I’m not 100% sure what I did with the original packet at this point. For my 7th grader, the parent
 8 portal shows 30 new assignments – five from each of her six class periods – that can be completed at
 9 the student’s pace throughout the coming week. Some of the activities require logging in to Google
 10 Classroom, which will be easy if I can remember her password. Other assignments use platforms I’ve
 11 never even heard of. What is she needs help using these platforms? Will her finished work be shared
 12 publicly? Will others be able to make comments about it? She was bullied last year so these
 13 possibilities make me worried.

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Reflection: Take a moment to consider the students’ and the parent’s experience in this scenario.

1. What feels similar to experiences students or families may experience in your school?
2. Where do you see unclear communication or unrealistic expectations?
3. How might better communication plans improve the students’ and parent’s experience?

Consistency across All Schools in a District

Communication across numerous platforms can cause not only confusion for the students but also for families. This frustration is multiplied for parents of multiple children. **Consistency is critical in making sure expectations are clearly understood by students and families and caregivers.**

Districts should create a communication plan for 2020-21 that is **consistent across classrooms and grade levels**. The plan should include guidance for how, when, and why teachers should communicate with families and students as it relates to blended and virtual instruction. This information should be shared with all constituents and made easily accessible for the duration of the academic year. Communication plans should minimally address the following components:

- Digital Tools and Support
- Course Structures and Expectations
- Assignments and Submission
- Instructional Support and Feedback
- Expectations for Independent Work (asynchronous)
- Expectations for Whole-Group Work (synchronous)

The following table provides guiding questions for the development of a plan that addresses how educators might communicate with students and families about each component.

Once the plan is published, display it in a place where all constituents can look to find the answers to these questions, such as an FAQ section on a school website, individual class homepages in a learning management system, or a pinned tweet on social media.

Plan Component	Guiding Questions for Communicating with Students	Guiding Questions for Communicating with Families
Digital Tools and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Learning Management System and/or Digital Tools will be used? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Learning Management System and/or Digital Tools will be used?

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What modes of communication will be used for which purposes? (See the Modes of Digital Communication section on p. 9.) • How will students learn how to use the digital tools? • Who to call for tech support during or outside of the school day? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What modes of communication will be used for which purposes? (See the Modes of Digital Communication section on p. 9.) • How will families learn how to use digital tools? • Who to call for tech support during or outside of the school day?
<p style="text-align: center;">Course Structures and Expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will grading work? • If a student is unable to attend a session or is sick, what are the 'make up' requirements? • What additional tools/websites are students allowed to reference (if any) during assessments? • How often are students expected to check their email or learning management system for announcements and updates on assignments? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the attendance policies? If a student is unable to attend a session or is sick, what are the 'make up' requirements? • How often will teachers send class updates? • How often will teachers reach out to individual families? • Will there be any positive communication or opportunities to hear about student successes? • In what ways can schools and teachers communicate with students and families to best meet learners' needs? • What is the expected time for families to receive a response to a question?
<p style="text-align: center;">Assignments and Submission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where and when will assignments be posted online each day? • What should students do when they need clarification related to assignments? • What is the specific time each day or day of the week that assignments are to be submitted? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where and when will assignments be posted online each day? • What is the specific time each day or day of the week that assignments are to be submitted? • Am I allowed to help my student(s) on their assignments? What kind of help is useful and what kind is counterproductive?

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are assignments to be submitted? 	
Instructional Support and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will teachers have office hours during which they will be available for one-on-one support and clarification? When will the office hours occur? How will students access the teacher during this time? How and when will students receive feedback on assignments or responses to questions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When is the teacher available for providing direct or one-on-one instructional support? What communication will occur if grades drop below a certain point? How and when will students receive feedback and grades on assignments?
Expectations for Independent Work (Asynchronous)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will students be required to check in daily? How will students check in to each class or with each teacher? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the expectations for synchronous participation? What if we can't access a video camera or don't want to join by video? How often will students have synchronous vs. asynchronous learning opportunities? How long should students spend on a particular subject area?
Expectations for Whole-Group Work (Synchronous)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the expectations for synchronous participation? How should students behave? What are the norms expected by participants for each session? 	

Additional Considerations for the Communication Plan

Throughout the communication plan, every effort should be made to make the communication clear, concise, and accessible. The following considerations provide ways in which communication plans can be improved:

- Survey constituents to determine the best tools and methods for communicating.**
Address internal communication with teachers and school/district employees and external communication with students, families, and other stakeholders. Establish expectations for frequency of communication (i.e., daily, weekly, need-based).
- Consider the best possible methods of communication based upon content shared.**
What primary and secondary modes of communication will be used for emergency information,

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important reminders, forms/documents, and surveys? See the next section for more information about modes of communication.

3. **Ensure communication is well-reasoned and edited before sharing.** If communication results from an event or situation involving extreme emotions, it is often better to take time to calm down before writing a response. This allows for reflection and clear thinking instead of responding impulsively.
4. **Ensure the tools used for communicating are age-appropriate for those receiving the information.** Remember that some social media is not legally accessible by younger learners.
5. **Make sure all instructions for all assignments and projects shared with students (and parents) are explicit.** Review instructions multiple times and consider what questions readers may encounter when trying to follow these instructions. Not all words have the same meaning when used in a technological context (i.e., cookies).
6. **Ensure all instructions are shared in a consistent manner and by a consistent time each day or week.** If students, teachers, family members do not know where to look for new information, they cannot be expected to be held accountable for missing something.
7. **Students (and parents) can understand instructions through multimodal and multilingual sharing.** Some learners may need video captioning if instructions are shared in a video, written instructions for reference purposes, or translation tools to understand expectations. Tools such as [Google Translate](#), [DeepL](#), and [Talking Points](#) may be useful for providing a bridge between languages. Selecting tools that integrate with [Microsoft's Immersive Reader](#) to read instructions aloud can help support learners with vision disabilities. Some learners need tools to help them enter thoughts and ideas into text. [Google Tools](#) and [Microsoft Tools](#) both offer voice to text typing options.

Modes of Digital Communication

Although there are numerous ways to communicate with families, districts should select and utilize a few standard modes of contact to be used by all school employees to maintain consistency. Below are some possible methods of communication and considerations for each method.

Mode	Description	Considerations
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email is an effective way to directly communicate with individual students, groups of students, and family members. Provides teachers a method to respond to individual student questions, provide guidance related to individual assignments or instruction, and provide regular updates on whole-class information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email communication may be suitable for students in middle and high school and family members of students of all ages. <i>Direct emails to students are not recommended unless student email accounts are issued and managed by the district.</i>
Phone Calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone calls are an effective and accessible way to directly communicate with individual students and/or family members. Where tone is of utmost importance and being able to provide clarifications immediately are needed, phone calls can show greater personal connection and help to make sure meaning is not lost through non-verbal communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone calls may be suitable for students in middle and high school and family members of students of all ages. Establish norms for responding to phone calls related to response expectations and quiet hours. For example, respond to calls within 2 school days and don't answer calls after 7:00 p.m., or other established time. <i>Sharing personal phone numbers is not recommended. Consider Google Voice or other phone number porting options.</i> <i>Review school policies to see if one-on-one calls and the recording of calls are allowed.</i>

<p>Text Messaging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text messages are an effective and accessible way to directly communicate with individual students or family members and groups of students or family members. • Tools such as Remind and Talking Points (especially useful for multilingual families) allow information to be shared in a text message without sharing a teacher’s personal phone number. • Teachers can send messages, share files and links, provide announcements, and reminders for upcoming events or due dates, and enable class or two-way messaging, when appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text messages, via a digital communication tool that has been vetted by the district, may be suitable for students in middle and high school and family members of students of all ages. • Other top picks for Best Messaging Apps and Websites for Students, Teachers, and Parents from CommonSense Media can be found here. • <i>Sharing personal phone numbers is not recommended.</i> • <i>Direct student contact is not recommended outside of approved apps.</i>
<p>Video Conferencing¹</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video conferences can be an effective way to communicate with participants who have the internet. • Some video conferencing tools allow for participants to call in using phones. This helps provide greater equality of access for students who may not have strong WiFi access at home. A simpler option is to use phone conferences (see the next item). • Many tools allow for the recording of sessions, which allows students to view on-demand playback if they were unable to attend during the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video conferencing may be appropriate for learners of all ages, though younger learners will almost certainly need support from family members or caregivers. • If students have difficulty hearing, captioning options are available on Google Slides. • <i>Read the Video Conferencing Considerations guidance from this spring for more information.</i> • <i>Review school policies to see if one-on-one sessions and the recording of sessions are allowed.</i>

¹ For **additional guidance related to the use of video conferencing** with students and families, refer to the [Video Conferencing Considerations](#) and [Sample Student Expectations for Video Conferencing](#) documents as well as the [Zoom Specific Information](#) and [Google Meet Specific Information](#) documents shared on the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s [Covid-19 Instructional Support](#) page.

	<p>scheduled meeting time or if they want to review the lesson.</p>	
<p>Phone Conferencing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phone conferences can be an effective and accessible way to communicate with participants who may not have access to the internet. ● Phone conferences have a reduced need for technical support and provide a more personalized message than can be shared through a text-only option. ● Web applications like FreeConferenceCall.com have additional options to manage phone conferences that increase security and caller management. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Options are available for audio or video calling, screen sharing, and session recording. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phone conferencing may be appropriate for learners of all ages, though younger learners may need support from families and caregivers. ● Does not require the sharing of personal phone numbers of any participants. ● Google Docs, presentations, or other online resources can still be used in tandem with phone conferencing. ● <i>Review school policies to see if one-on-one calls and the recording of calls are allowed.</i>
<p>Hyperdocs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hyperdocs can be an effective and accessible way to communicate with learners and families. ● Hyperdocs are digital documents, such as Google Docs or Slides that mimic a simple LMS or webpage. Often referred to as “Hubs”. ● Allows users to view linked information based upon need or want. ● All information for an assignment or project can be shared easily within one document. Parent-facing versions can also be created and easily updated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hyperdocs can be an effective and accessible way to communicate with learners and families of all ages ● Does not require users to type in additional website URL or go out to the Internet to search for information. URL shorteners such as Bitly and TinyURL can make access especially easy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provides a safer Internet experience, especially for younger users ● See this example for teachers.

<p>Social Media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media can be an effective and accessible way to share brief announcements, reminders, links to resources, and celebrations with learners and families. • This method allows a teacher to share what is going on in the classroom with a broader audience. • Private or closed class accounts can be created and then join information can be shared only with students and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media communication may be suitable for students in middle and high school and family members of students of all ages. • <i>Review school policies and ensure individual student permission before sharing student work or images. For additional guidelines on how to protect student privacy on social media, Common Sense Media resource.</i>
<p>Learning Management System (LMS) Announcements and Discussion Boards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMS announcements and discussion boards can be an effective way to communicate with participants who have the internet. • Announcements can be posted for all users to view when they log in. In some cases, emails can be sent to users to alert them to the new announcement. • Allows a teacher to post a discussion question or topic and to provide guidelines for student responses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students can post threads of their comments ○ Students can choose to respond to comments left by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMS announcements and discussion boards may be suitable for students in upper elementary, middle, and high school and families and caregivers of students of all ages. • If this is the general tool for delivering instruction, it may be necessary to provide guidelines regarding the expected frequency of student access (ie. morning, afternoon, both start and end of the school day, other). • <i>If using discussion boards, it is important to monitor student posts concerning inappropriate content and bullying. Many platforms have settings that allow teachers to approve posts before they are made visible to all learners.</i>

Build and Maintain Community with Digital Tools

How can we ensure students are engaged in a positive learning community while learning in a blended or virtual environment?

Research shows that students who feel a connection to their teachers and classmates tend to perform better in the classroom. Classroom structures and routines, and a mix of spontaneous interactions in the classroom, hallways, and throughout the school strengthen relationships among students and teachers and students and their peers. While these can all happen in a blended or virtual learning setting, it will require new routines, expectations, and strategies.

This section explores the features of positive learning communities and the opportunities teachers have to create new behavior expectations, build classroom community, and engage families and caregivers as meaningful partners in this new reality.

Consider the following scenario in which a student is engaged in a virtual learning experience while spending most of her day at home with her little sister:

1 This morning's virtual classes were a flurry for Tania. She joined 3 different classes in back-to-back
2 video conferences. In the first period, the tech issues were so frustrating, she didn't even pay
3 attention at all. During the second and third classes, she was there but she's pretty sure no one would
4 have even noticed if she wasn't. As Tania made a quick lunch for herself and her sister, she wondered
5 if she'd actually understood how to complete her "independent" work from her math class. Nothing
6 made sense last week, and the office hours option just hasn't worked well since so many other
7 students show up at the same time. The videos are helpful enough, but with Facebook open in the
8 other tab and her sister, Stacia, getting restless, it's a little hard to focus. Fourth- through sixth-period
9 classes are always hard. She misses her fourth-period classes on Mondays and Wednesdays and every
10 other Friday since she shares a laptop with her little sister. Thankfully, Stacia's class has its morning
11 meeting before my first-period class so they don't overlap. Feeling a little overwhelmed at the idea of
12 having to make up all that work from her fourth-period class, Tania decides to skip her sixth-period
13 video conference and work a little more on that report. It's weird going to school all week and not
14 really having a chance to even say hi to her friends in person. She thinks to herself that no one really
15 even asks her how she's doing. Even if they did, it's hard to describe how exhausting it is to take care
16 of her little sister all day and still stay caught up with school work.

Reflection: Take a moment to consider Tania's experience in this scenario.

1. What feels similar to the experiences students may experience in your school?

2. What aspects of her school day are designed to provide structure and community?
3. How might teachers create opportunities to improve Tania's experience and sense of belonging?

Creating New Routines

Routines are the bones and ligaments of a classroom; when they are strong and hold everything together, everything else can be layered upon them to create a successful learning experience. Creating routines in a blended or virtual learning environment is similar but signs and posters are harder to point to when a gentle reminder is needed. **More so than ever before routines should be established and shared across teachers who share students.** If the routines differ from teacher to teacher, student confusion and exhaustion are likely. Here are some tips for online classroom routines from the National Institute for STEM Education (NISE) that can be used in any class. [Read more at the NISE website here.](#)

1. **Clearly post routines and expectations for students.** This may include weekly and daily to-do lists, one-stop shopping for links and resources, and support for young readers (like using brief, simple videos). However it happens, be consistent, use the routines, and refer to them often.
2. **Put extra effort into making sure all communications in the online classroom are easy for students to understand.** Use very clear, plain words, decrease complexity, include tables and charts, consistently use the same word for the same concept, be careful with multiple-meaning words and colloquialisms, and use bullets, numbered lists, and other text features to make reading easier.
3. **Provide a common place for questions and responses from the teacher or student.** This strategy can help reduce repeating yourself in email and discussion board questions, but then requires frequent monitoring of the question page.
4. **Teach and uphold positive social norms.** Basic social etiquette, or manners, is just as important online as on-site. Online they are often referred to as *netiquette*. Students will not necessarily bring these skills with them.
5. **Explore digital tools.** Countless free digital tools will help you facilitate your online routines. However, choose one or two tools that you feel will work best to increase efficiency for you and your students, and use those consistently. Avoid the temptation to incorporate all of the tools that interest you. Rather, focus on a few tools that students can navigate easily.

6. **Continue “caring” routines and rituals.** Just like in a brick-and-mortar classroom, online classrooms benefit from specific routines and procedures that help students feel welcome and valued in their learning environment. Think about routines or rituals you use in the physical classroom that you might bring into the online classroom.

Building Classroom Community

Building strong relationships with students, and creating opportunities for students to build relationships with one another, is often the baseline requirement to have a successful school year. Doing both in a virtual setting can certainly happen, but may require some additional strategies. Author Dave Stuart Jr. produced a simple set of grounding principles and practices that may be helpful as you think about how to ensure you have a strong relationship with each of your students. Read more about these principles and practices, [visit his blog here](#).

- ❑ **Grounding Principle 1:** You know things that work for building relationships in normal circumstances.
- ❑ **Grounding Principle 2:** Relationships aren't the point of school, but they are one of its highest rewards and strongest currencies.
- ❑ **Grounding Principle 3:** Just as relationships are not automatically created when we're in-person with someone, they are not automatically hampered when we're not in-person with someone.
- ❑ **Practice 1:** Build your knowledge of your students by memorizing their names and interests rapidly. To do this, quiz yourself.
- ❑ **Practice 2:** Create a tracking mechanism for moments of genuine connection, then decide on a pace and format that makes sense given your constraints.
- ❑ **Practice 3:** Make positive phone calls to 3-5 parents per weekday (adjust frequency as needed for your sanity, but note that doing this for your roster is a long-term sanity aid).

When students do not have connections with their peers, they are less likely to take risks, make public comments in whole-group settings, and may be more likely to receive critical comments about their ideas as personal attacks. Create opportunities for students to interact with one another informally and academically.

Breakout groups in Zoom and other video-conferencing platforms may be useful with some age groups. Consider ensuring no fewer than 3 students are in a breakout room together. Ensure students

know how to invite the Host into the breakout room if they need additional support and provide simple options for students to report bullying or other negative experiences to an adult.

Partnering with Families

The following is an excerpt from [Engaging Families in Reopening Our Schools \(June 2020\)](#) produced by the OSDE's Office of Family and Community Engagement.

During the period of temporary school building closures and implementation of distance learning, typical school and family interactions underwent a rapid and significant change. Schools and families were required to shift and reframe their connections. Educators reached into each family's home to help guide student learning through a variety of mediums. Building authentic partnerships, mutual trust and respect, and meaningful opportunities for two-way communication became even more essential to ensure learning continuity.

What key opportunities for family engagement should school leaders focus on during this time to ensure success?

- **Strengthening Relationships:** Establish more personalized, two-way communication between schools and families, build mutual trust, and provide families an authentic sense of engagement in their child's learning.
- **Building Capacity:** Expand the capacity of all school staff to be able to engage in meaningful partnerships with families and build each family's skills, abilities, and confidence to support their child's learning.
- **Focusing on Learning:** Leverage available resources from school and home and seek opportunities to inquire about student and family interests to create meaningful learning.
- **Connecting Communities:** Engage with the greater community to help meet the basic needs of families through a response that is compassionate and culturally responsive.

While family engagement has traditionally centered around school extracurriculars, behavior and academic struggles (and successes), and the logistics of the school day and calendar, the opportunity to engage families in these ways still exists in a virtual space. Virtual family-parent events, student presentations to the public, and other community engagement activities are still possible. As the guidance above suggests, there are also new opportunities to partner with families as they may be carrying an enormous role in facilitating learning in the home.

To meaningfully partner with families and caregivers, begin by assessing the needs and opportunities by reaching out to the families of students in your class. Consider them co-teachers in the coming year and learn about their needs, wants, and how they can support their students and each other.

Empower Student Choice through Digital Tools

How can we ensure students are engaged and motivated while learning in a blended or virtual environment?

Traditionally, teachers play the role of director or facilitator for all aspects of education. They thoughtfully enact lessons and instructional strategies that help to build purposeful, motivated, resourceful, knowledgeable, strategic, and goal-directed students. Teachers seek out and create new opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of content and critical processes. The transition to distance learning requires that teachers are even more intentional and creative as they offer students voice and choice in how they engage in, represent, and express their learning.

Consider the following scenario in which a student is engaged in a virtual learning experience that provides them multiple means of engagement, representation, expression and action:

1 Each week, we get to work on one large project. We get to meet for 90 minutes on Monday and
2 Friday and have three 30-minute check-ins on Tuesday through Thursday. In the first 90-minute
3 meeting for Social Studies last week, we got a lot of opportunities to talk and make sure we
4 understood the goals of the project. My project was about what role the government should play in
5 taking care of its people. Before we even started, we had a chance to make a claim about it and share
6 the claim with others to see if we were on the same page. We paired up with someone with a different
7 opinion and then built a presentation that argues their case. We could read articles and primary
8 sources, watch videos, and listen to podcasts to help us get ideas. The main project hub in Google
9 Docs helped me understand what my expectations were and included links so I could easily navigate
10 to everything I needed. Plus, the check-ins were really useful because there was a lot of data I needed
11 help understanding. I decided my project presentation would be a made-up Tweet-thread of FDR
12 talking about why the New Deal had to be as big as it was. When my partner gave his presentation
13 about my argument to me, I got to build upon it. On Friday, I got to share my presentation with our
14 city's Homeless Alliance since it was focused on local efforts around affordable housing. I added a
15 10-minute podcast to the presentation so people could learn more about it if they wanted. We did the
16 final reflections on VoiceThread, which was nice because it gave me a chance to think about the role
17 governments have to take on when the issues are bigger than what individuals and communities can
18 solve on their own. I loved hearing everyone else's ideas too!

Reflection: Take a moment to consider the student’s experience in this scenario.

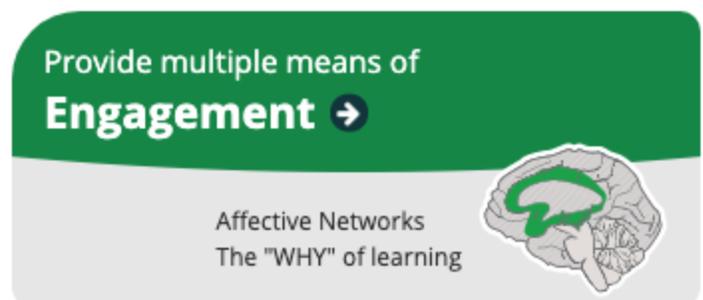
1. What feels similar to experiences students may experience in your school, even if you don’t have time built in for projects like this?
2. What aspects of the lesson are designed to provide voice and choice?
3. Review the nine [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) guidelines](#). Which of the nine are well represented in this scenario and which are less visible?

Universal Design for Learning

Opportunities for students to have voice and choice in the classroom, whether in-person, blended, or virtual, can happen in manners that allow for different pace, place, paths, and products. While there are many ways to think about how to build in choice, perhaps one of the most widely researched methods called Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The UDL guidelines and benchmarks allow teachers of all grades and disciplines to identify strategies, routines, and digital tools that help meet each benchmark. The three main *domains* for choice occur by providing multiple means of (1) engagement, (2) representation, and (3) expression and action. Each of the three domains correlates to areas of the brain that are activated, or not. The following sections introduce each domain, the guidelines, and benchmarks of UDL and short ideas for blended or virtual instructional activities are provided. For more information about UDL, visit <http://castprofessionallearning.org/online-courses>.

Providing Multiple Means of Engagement

According to the [Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\)](#), “Affect represents a crucial element to learning, and learners differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn. There are a variety of sources that can influence individual variation in affect including neurology, culture, personal relevance, subjectivity, and background knowledge, along with a variety of other factors. Some learners are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty while others are disengaged, even frightened, by those aspects, preferring strict routine. Some learners might like to work alone, while others prefer to work



with their peers. In reality, there is not one means of engagement that will be optimal for all learners in all contexts; providing multiple options for engagement is essential.”

The following table outlines a few ways in which digital tools might support the [Engagement Guidelines and Checkpoints](#):

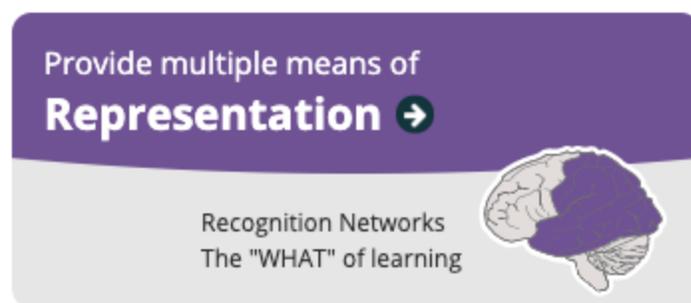
Guideline	Checkpoints	Strategies and Related Digital Tools
Recruiting Interest: Spark excitement and curiosity for learning. Learn more.	Optimize individual choice and autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to select a specific number of activities within a choice board to demonstrate understanding.
	Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch weekly lesson cycles with short, engaging video clips or readings about real-world experiences, phenomena, and stories through Ted-Ed or Newsela.
	Minimize threats and distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a tool such as ClassroomScreen to help students focus on tasks and see teacher expectations.
Sustaining Effort and Persistence: Tackle challenges with focus and determination. Learn more.	Heighten salience (or awareness) of goals and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short, weekly video messages using Screencast-o-matic that summarize the week’s goals and remind students of how the content is related to prior learning.
	Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide students with a list of 3-5 digital tools that could be used to complete an assignment and allow them to select the tool they would like to use.
	Foster collaboration and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When sharing web resources for research, share via Hypothes.is to allow for students to collaboratively annotate and discuss what they are reading.
	Increase mastery-oriented feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to student work with quick videos with annotations and commentary using Educreations.

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Self Regulation: Harness the power of emotions and motivation in learning. Learn more.	Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce students to Tomatotimers, a digital Pomodoro timer, that helps them practice time management skills.
	Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Calm or DreamyKid to incorporate meditation practices as opportunities for students to relax and unwind.
	Develop self-assessment and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have students complete a Google Form at the end of each day/week to reflect upon their focus or work completion.

Providing Multiple Means of Representation

According to the [Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\)](#), “Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them. For example, those with sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness); learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia); language or cultural differences, and may all require different ways of approaching content. Others may simply grasp information more quickly or more efficiently through visual or auditory means rather than printed text. Learning and transfer of learning occur when multiple representations are used because they allow students to make connections within, as well as between, concepts. In short, there is not one means of representation that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for representation is essential.”



The following table outlines a few ways in which digital tools might support the [Representation Guidelines and Checkpoints](#):

Guideline	Checkpoints	Strategies and Related Digital Tools
Perception: Interact with flexible content	Offer ways of customizing the display of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure students who have trouble processing audio direction know how to change the speed of playback for videos on YouTube

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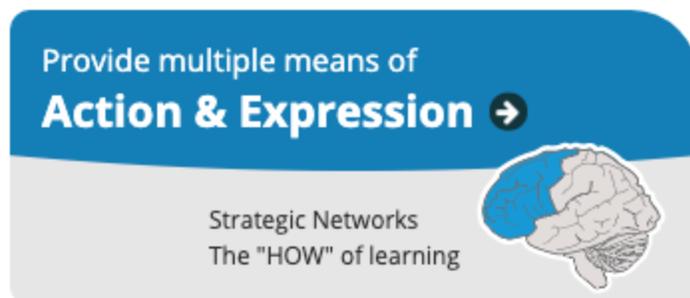
<p>that doesn't depend on a single sense like sight, hearing, movement, or touch.</p> <p>Learn more.</p>	Offer alternatives for auditory information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide students with a written transcript of videos created for instruction.
	Offer alternatives for visual information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure students who have trouble reading on screens have access to VoiceOver, TalkBack, or ChromeVox.
<p>Language and Symbols: Communicate through languages that create a shared understanding.</p> <p>Learn more.</p>	Clarify vocabulary and symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use Google Doc comments or tools like Actively Learn to add supporting clarifications in readings or assignments.
	Clarify syntax and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider allowing older students to use Grammarly to help improve documents and develop better writing skills.
	Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allow students to verbally and visually explain the process for solving a math problem using Desmos Activity or Flipgrid.
	Promote understanding across languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use tools such as Google Translate, DeepL, and Talking Points to translate information.
	Illustrate through multiple media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaborate with students to map out a narrative or model a phenomenon using Draw.io or StoryboardThat.
<p>Comprehension: Construct meaning and generate new understandings.</p> <p>Learn more.</p>	Activate or supply background knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access prior knowledge using Kahoot! or Formative.
	Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use tools such as Mind Meister or Lucid Chart to create mind maps or to brainstorm.
	Guide information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create assignment flow charts using Bubble.us

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	processing and visualization	
	Maximize transfer and generalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide students with digital graphic organizer templates to use to organize information.

Providing Multiple Means of Action and Expression

According to the [Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\)](#), “Learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know. For example, individuals with significant movement impairments (e.g., cerebral palsy), those who struggle with strategic and organizational abilities (executive function disorders), those who have language barriers, approach learning tasks very differently. Some may be able to express themselves well in written text but not speech, and vice versa. It should also be recognized that action and expression require a great deal of strategy, practice, and organization, and this is another area in which learners can differ. In reality, there is not one means of action and expression that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for action and expression is essential.”



The following table outlines a few ways in which digital tools might support the [Action and Expression Guidelines and Checkpoints](#):

Guideline	Checkpoints	Strategies and Related Digital Tools
Physical Action: Interact with accessible materials and tools. Learn more.	Vary the methods for response and navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to use voice-to-text tools in Google Docs or use virtual online manipulatives found at Toy Theater or National Library of Virtual Manipulatives.
	Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide direct links to frequently used digital tools in a document that is housed in Google Classroom or on Symbaloo.

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<p>Expression and Communication: Compose and share ideas using tools that help attain learning goals.</p> <p>Learn more.</p>	Use multiple media for communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create short videos for students to view when learning new digital tools, but also provide a document that includes both step-by-step instructions and images for learners who would like a reference document.
	Use multiple tools for construction and composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to select tools to complete assignments. One student may want to use Audacity to make a podcast about a novel they've read while another student may want to create a Google Earth Tour based upon a character's path in a novel.
	Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the comment tool in Google Docs, Slides, and Sheets to provide students with direction and specific feedback to their work.
<p>Executive Functions: Develop and act on plans to make the most out of learning.</p> <p>Learn more.</p>	Guide appropriate goal-setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students opportunities to create project checklists using Google Keep or Google Docs
	Support planning and strategy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to create a Google Site to act as a portfolio of student work and evidence of accomplishing goals.
	Facilitate managing information and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students create a folder for each class within Google Drive. These can be color-coded for quick visual reference. Guide students to create subfolder systems based upon units or projects.
	Enhance capacity for monitoring progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Google Classroom and Google Docs to share assignments with students allows teachers to view each student document to monitor progress.

Digital Tool Guides and Tutorials

Finding the right tutorials for digital tools can be a challenge. Thankfully, a lot of excellent tutorials for all of the digital tools listed here and more have been organized for you. The [Tutorials and Guides for](#)

[Digital Tools](#) document highlights nine of the most common tools that teachers have asked for guidance. Over 200 other tutorials for [Google Tools](#) and [Other Educational Digital Tools](#) have been organized and hyperlinked in a searchable database. If you have a request for tutorials that you cannot find, reach out to [Karen Leonard](#) and we can try to assist!

TOOL		Count			
▼ Flipgrid		Count: 17			
56	Flipgrid	Teachers	Beginner	How to Use Flipgrid	video
57	Flipgrid	Students	Beginner	How to Get Started with ...	video
58	Flipgrid	Teachers, Students	Beginner	How to Use Flipgrid on a...	video
<input type="checkbox"/>	Flipgrid	Teachers, Students	Beginner	How to Use Flipgrid's An...	video
60	Flipgrid	Teachers, Students	Beginner	How to Upload Replies to...	video
61	Flipgrid	Teachers	Intermediate	How to Create Custom Fl...	video
62	Flipgrid	Teachers, Administrat...	Intermediate	Use a Spreadsheet to Cr...	video

Ongoing Support for Instruction

OSDE will continue to provide ongoing support for instruction during the 2020-2021 academic year. Continue to check the [OSDE Education Technology Website](#) to see upcoming professional learning opportunities, office hours, and additional instructional resources.

Professional Learning Opportunities

- [Tech Tuesday Recordings](#): Learn about different education technology tools for instruction.

OSDE Hosted Virtual Meetings

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

Education Technology Virtual Meetings

- Every 4th Monday of each month, 3:30-4:30 p.m.
- First meeting will occur on August 24th; [Register here](#).
- Zoom information will be communicated through the EdTech Newsletter. Subscribe [here!](#)

Social Media Connections

Facebook Communities

- Education Technology: [#OKEdTech](#)

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- [Teach with Tech](#)
- [Technology Tips for Techie Teachers](#)

Twitter

- Use and search **#OKEdTech** to highlight and find education technology resources for Oklahoma Educators.
- Use and search **#EdTech** to highlight and find education technology resources for the global math community.
- **@oksde** - OSDE Twitter Account

State-Level Technology Organizations

- [Oklahoma Technology Association](#)

Contact Information

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