

The Virtual Learning Environment:**Ideas on Quality Practice in a Virtual, Hybrid or School Classroom**

Teachers may want to consider using this document as a basis for conversations and planning sessions within a Professional Learning Community.

Going back to school in the Fall of 2020 will be different for most children in New Jersey. Some children will return to a school classroom, others will experience a hybrid model of teaching and learning in school and on a computer, and other children will learn 100% remotely using technology as a tool.

This unique school year prompts a new question: Can virtual learning environments facilitate high-quality practice and provide children with an exciting new vision for learning everywhere at any time?

The answer lies in the many indicators of a high-quality early childhood education that apply to both the traditional and the virtual classroom. With some new thinking and planning, familiar teaching and learning strategies can also become innovative approaches for the virtual learning environment and can lead to a very successful school year.

ARRANGEMENT OF LEARNING SPACE AT HOME AND VISUAL LEARNING SPACES ONLINE

- Virtual classrooms (and any learning spaces visible on a computer screen) appear organized and divided into “centers” when possible. (Teaching from a school classroom – with or without students - serves as the best visual for remote learning.)
- When learning at home, children have a place to organize their materials for use and put them away when necessary. (Examples: A shoe box for crayons and markers, laundry basket, bags or backpacks to collect other items.)
- Children have a well-lit space to sit or stand with proper posture and see a computer or paper worksheets.
- Children have soft furnishings where learning can take place without extended viewing of the computer screen. (Examples: While a teacher reads a story on the computer screen, children can sit on pillows, folded blankets on the floor or in comfortable furniture.)
- Children have relaxation areas for reading, thinking and talking with adults about learning activities. (Examples: The child’s bed, a blanket on the floor, a comfy chair or sofa, quiet outside spot, during a regularly scheduled walk together)
- Children can use a specific space that is dedicated for learning. (Examples: Desk, kitchen table, dining table, coffee table, private corner in a room)

ACCESSIBILITY IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS

- Instruction and use of materials encourage independence for all children.
- Activities and materials can be adapted for individual children as needed.
- Pictures of the virtual classroom include furniture and equipment appropriate for children with a variety of abilities and needs.
- Instruction using movement around a computer screen should be planned and adapted for all children.

DIVERSITY

- Materials, discussions and instruction include diverse people, places, customs, ethnicities, cultures, abilities, languages, ages, and the celebration of other unique individuals.
- Diversity is integrated throughout daily activities and lessons.
- School and home communications, family engagement opportunities and learning support respect all families in all living and learning environments.

HEALTH AND CLASSROOM SAFETY

- Health and safety measures meet health and safety standards.
- The virtual classroom also maintains health and safety practices.
- Hygiene should be modeled by teachers and supported at home – Examples: Children watch

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plan floor space around the computer so children can become physically active and use movement within lessons. ○ Provide a space where the child can make noise and use music and sounds in lessons. <p>DISPLAY OF CHILDREN'S WORK PRODUCTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Virtual classrooms maintain a background where children's work products are displayed. ○ Child products are changed regularly. ○ Child products include original work. ○ Children select their items to be displayed. ○ Children have at least one item displayed. <p>USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children and the adults who are supporting their learning are informed about the benefits of hands-on materials for learning projects. ○ Teachers provide suggestions for no-cost remote learning materials and seek support for community donation where possible. ○ Teachers frequently communicate and provide families with enough time to obtain and prepare learning materials prior to lessons. ○ Schools budget, where possible, to send learning materials home for remote learning. <p>MONITORING CHILD PROGRESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers collect data on children's progress. ○ Evidence of learning is collected within the context of instruction. ○ Teachers provide families with information on how to look for learning and general application of new skills. ("Look-fors") ○ Multiple sources of data are used to make instructional decisions. ○ Each teacher formally schedules a conference with each child including parents as partners. ○ Teachers apply equity practices to provide each family with regular and frequent opportunities to communicate about their child's progress. ○ Teachers develop a meaningful communication system where families can share observations of new learning. ○ Teachers collect data on IEP objectives. <p>CHILDREN'S ROLE IN DECISION MAKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children make choices about learning and activities in the school and virtual classroom. 	<p>teachers wash their hands and properly put face masks on and take them off.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers model safety practices (in the school if possible) to prepare the child for when he returns to the classroom. ○ Teachers encourage families to complete school health surveys and health data collection in order to maintain the child's health records at school. ○ Teachers encourage parents to participate in two-way, child health communication with the adults responsible for the child. ○ Special precautions and considerations are taken for children with disabilities. ○ Teachers be trained in first aid and can model behaviors and expectations for when the child returns to the classroom. <p>CHILD-CENTERED LANGUAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teacher encourages and shows interest in children's statements/questions. ○ Teacher's feedback is constructive. ○ Children have opportunities to talk with their peers. ○ Teacher's questions require more than correct answers. ○ Teacher prompts children to elaborate and explain their thinking. ○ Children have many opportunities to talk with teachers and their peers during instruction and activities, as appropriate. ○ Informal conversations occur at various points before, during and after the learning time. <p>INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers arrange for some shared learning where possible (including virtual experiences). ○ Children are asked to explain their answers. ○ Teachers use at least two instructional methods within at least two subject areas. ○ Teachers facilitate group discussions among children (where possible). ○ Teachers use a variety of methods to engage and accommodate children's learning styles. ○ Teachers make time to build the capacity of parents and families, modeling support strategies and a variety of ways to enrich learning at home. ○ Teachers prioritize equity in all academic communications and supports for parents and families.
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- Teachers guide children through the decision-making process and reinforce productive behaviors.
- Children have opportunities to make decisions that affect the entire class or group.
- Teachers promote students' self-sufficiency.
- Children make a variety of choices and can communicate why they made the choice.
- Teachers provide parents and families with the rationale for child choice and decision-making assignments.

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- All children have the same opportunities to learn and interact with their peers and participate in the same class activities.
- All IEP components are honored and upheld.
- General education teachers frequently communicate with other education team members about child progress.
- IEP objectives are addressed within the context of regular class activities.
- Appropriate modifications are made in compliance with IEP.
- Teachers make time to communicate and build parents' capacity to support their child as per IEP goals.

SOCIAL SKILLS

- Adults demonstrate positive social skills throughout the day.
- Expectations of behavior are age-appropriate.
- Rules are shared with children and their families and posted in the school and virtual classroom.
- Children receive praise for appropriate social behavior.
- Adults use redirection and positive reinforcement to help children negotiate solutions to problems.
- Consequences are implemented consistently.
- Teachers provide families with insight on the developmentally appropriate practices used for teaching and learning in the school and virtual classroom.
- Teachers support families in choosing developmentally appropriate activities to expand their child's learning at home.

INTEGRATION AND BREADTH OF SUBJECTS

- Math, language arts, science, and social studies are taught to all children.
- Fine arts are offered to all children.
- Teachers facilitate activities and projects that require children to use skills from multiple-subject areas.
- At least half of learning time is dedicated for activities and projects that require children to use skills from multiple-subject areas.
- Children play and learn outside on a daily basis (weather permitting).
- All children have opportunities and are guided through gross motor play.

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Teachers communicate with families as equitable partners in their child's learning and development.
- Teachers provide several opportunities and ask parents how they want to support their child's learning.
- Communication is equitable and individualized.
- Individual family conferences are held at the beginning of the school year, offered after marking periods and encouraged at the end of the year to review student progress and identify learning goals for moving forward.
- Teachers extend parents a standing invitation to communicate about their child's learning and development.
- Parents observe how their child applies new knowledge and skills.
- Within the learning partnerships built with teachers, parents share their observations and work with the teacher to build joint goals for future learning.

The Division of Early Childhood Education acknowledges the term "parent" to indicate any adult who plays a legal and significant role in a student's life, including, parents; stepparents; parents' significant others; foster parents; siblings; grandparents; aunts, uncles, and extended family; caretakers; and others who regularly contribute in important ways to a child's education and development. The term "parent" may be used interchangeably with the word "family" or the phrase "parent and family" in reference to those who share responsibility for the well-being of a child.

Modified from the *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)*, by Hemmeter, Maxwell, Ault, and Schuster.