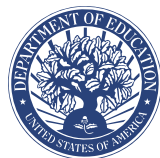


Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide



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Educational Technology

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What can this guide do for you? This “Parent and Family Digital Learning Guide” will help you, as a parent or caregiver, understand important approaches for using technology in a manner that focuses on the needs of your child. This guide provides resources that will help you as you work with your child, your child’s teachers, and school leaders to prepare your child for success in digital learning.¹

This guide is built to help parents, including those who have limited experience with digital tools, those who are familiar with these tools, and others in between. This means that each section will start with foundational pieces and build from there.

INTRODUCTION

What should my child know and how do I know if they have learned it? How can I be sure that my child is progressing and getting the help they need? How should my child use technology for learning and what is the right balance of being online vs. offline? How can my child stay connected with their friends and teachers?

Parents, educators, and researchers have asked these questions for years; they are even more relevant in light of the prolonged school building closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

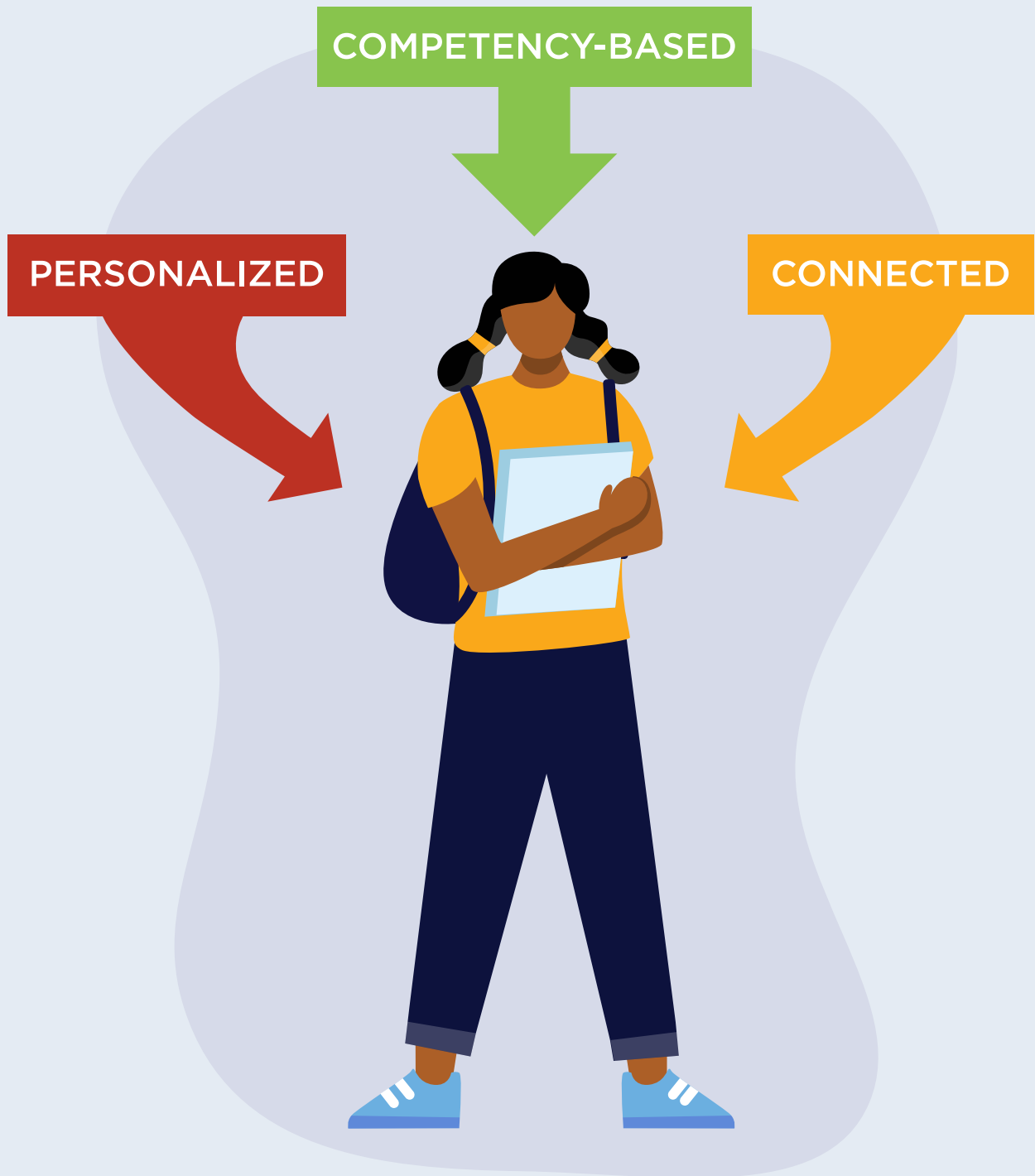
Is technology the answer to all of these questions? No, of course not. Technology is a tool. Technology, when used appropriately, can empower learning, engage and motivate students, and help make learning interactive. Teachers can use technology to personalize learning and adapt to the needs of your child, factoring in your child’s strengths, interests, and weaknesses. Today’s digital tools and resources support and enhance learning at home and will help you to support your child’s success and develop skills for their future.

Digital tools (such as devices, apps, and platforms) can create flexible learning environments, help you and your child set clear and easy-to-understand learning goals, and keep track of progress. These tools help facilitate communication between you and your child’s teacher, allowing you to work together toward ensuring that your child succeeds inside and outside of the classroom. To take full advantage of this potential, your child will need access to a device and the internet (at school and at home). Your child also needs carefully selected digital tools, resources, and guidance on how to use technology safely and appropriately. Having access, devices, internet connectivity, and digital tools is ideal, but we know this isn’t the reality for everyone. In these cases, children may need to engage in remote learning—for example, paper packets with supplemental learning from a device whenever possible. This guide will focus on making the most of situations where digital learning is possible.

¹ “Digital learning” is used throughout this guide to refer to learning that leverages digital tools and resources, regardless of where it occurs.

PART ONE

BENEFITS OF DIGITAL LEARNING



The following sections explain three distinct benefits of digital learning. Digital learning can help you and your child’s teacher meet the specific needs of your child, understand your child’s progress, and connect you and your child with your school community and beyond.

Each benefit is explained below, along with questions you may ask your child’s teacher, so you can take advantage of these benefits and the resources that are available.

MEETING THE LEARNING NEEDS OF YOUR CHILD: PERSONALIZED LEARNING

This section in 30 seconds: You and your child’s teacher can use technology and digital tools to make sure that your child is learning in the ways that work best for them. These tools can help change the way content is presented and provide flexibility, so your child has a chance to demonstrate what they have learned in the way that is most effective and appropriate for them.

A “one size fits all” approach to education does not work to address the uniqueness of each learner. Learning experiences should engage, honor, and challenge students and provide support tailored to address their individual strengths, needs, abilities, and interests. A personalized learning approach may complement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) which are designed to guarantee supportive services to meet the needs of students with disabilities.² However, a personalized learning approach and an IEP are not the same thing. The requirements of an Individualized Education Program are provided in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and those same requirements may not apply to students who don’t have a documented disability.

To personalize learning, the learning experiences and resources provided should be flexible and follow a sequence that builds upon skills that develop your child’s confidence and motivation. You know your child best, and helping teachers understand your child is part of personalizing learning. Teachers can use technology in powerful ways that support this personalization of learning.

Personalized learning is an educational approach that tailors learning experiences to each student’s strengths, needs, skills, and interests (Morin, 2020).

Provide multiple means of engagement. Learners can be motivated to learn in different ways, and a wide variety of factors can influence learning. These include:

Relevance (e.g., can my child make connections to the materials and assignments? Can my child relate to the topics and/or apply their skills outside of school?);

interest (e.g., does my child get excited when talking about this topic?);

² Note that a personalized learning approach may also complement the services and accommodations provided to students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 34 C.F.R. § 104.33.

language (e.g., can my child understand and access the language in their materials and/or assignments? Do the assignments that are given to my child help build fluency and vocabulary, even if they are learning English?);

background knowledge (e.g., can this topic be connected to something that my child already knows or has experienced?); and

differences in how they process information (e.g., does my child have a specific learning disability like dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia), a sensory disability such as blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, or other difference in how they process or access information?).

Digital tools allow teachers to make changes based on your child's preferences. Here are four ways that technology can be used to customize learning to your child's needs and preferences:

- 1. Choose your preferred learning environment.** Digital technologies allow learning to take place synchronously (i.e., at the same time), asynchronously (i.e., not at the same time), or both synchronously and asynchronously (e.g., with a mix of live interactions and assignments completed according to each student's own schedule and pace). Learning can be organized for individual, small group, and whole class interactions, which may appeal to different learners' preferences.

Examples of Synchronous Activities

- A scheduled class in a school
- Live video conferencing with interactive participation
- A scheduled online live chat session
- A scheduled time during which teachers or tutors are available

Examples of Asynchronous Activities

- Completing assigned homework
 - Viewing a library or playlist of videos
 - Engaging in individual or group activities where students choose the time to participate
- 2. Uncover new learning opportunities.** Many technology applications can support partner or group work and facilitate feedback from peers and teachers. Such applications can also help your child find new things to learn. For example, many sources of information are available online, such as from museums and libraries, historical sites, scientific laboratories, and other sources from the web that support curiosity, inquiry, and research. These tools can also help your child access digital books, simulations, games, interactive content, and online explorations. We have listed several examples in the resources at the end of this section.
 - 3. Support creative means of expression.** Your child can learn to use digital tools for organizing, researching, writing, publishing, and creating media on topics that are important and interesting to them. Students can also keep their own personal portfolio, a record of their learning, and a blog or journal including reflections on their goals and learning progress.

4. Provide fast feedback. Technology can offer real-time assessment of learning and progress to inform and guide your child as they work. This enables your child to self-monitor and gives you and your child's teacher information to know how best to provide support.

Provide multiple means of interacting with content. Learners differ in the ways in which they best access and comprehend information. Some students grasp information more quickly through visual or auditory means rather than printed text. Other students may need special supports to remember things or keep track of multiple-step problems that they are trying to solve.

There are two groups of students that may benefit most from this type of flexibility, although it is important to also note that these groups are not the same and may need unique supports that are relevant to their individual background:

1. If your child has any sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness) or learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia), or
2. If your child speaks a language other than English or is a newcomer student, they may benefit when content and resources are presented in a variety of ways.

Under federal law,³ websites and apps used in schools must be accessible or if necessary, schools must provide equally effective alternate access, so that no student is denied the opportunity to learn because of their language background or disability.

English Learners

“Parents or guardians may choose for their child to receive services to learn English if their child is identified as needing these services. School districts and schools are required by federal law to provide these services. Schools must ensure meaningful communication with limited English proficient [students?]” (NCELA, 2018, pg. 2).

Additionally, your child may differ in the ways that they can best demonstrate what they know.⁴ Your child may be able to express themselves well in written text but struggle with speech, or vice versa. Children may be able to show what they have learned through illustration better than following conventions of text on pages and margins. With the right tools and accommodations in testing and throughout the learning process, all students can have multiple means of accessing content and demonstrating content mastery.

³ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II).

⁴ Unless otherwise noted this guide does not address schools' responsibilities to provide services or modifications to students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, or Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Information about the IDEA is available at <https://osepideasthatwork.org/>. Information about Section 504 and Title II is available at www.ed.gov/ocr. The Department recognizes the need for additional flexibility in the provision of educational services during the national emergency caused by COVID-19. For more information, please see the Department's web page COVID-19 (“Coronavirus”) Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel, at <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus?src=feature>. The resources listed on this page include the following: “Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Outbreak” (March 12, 2020); “Fact Sheet: Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools While Protecting the Civil Rights of Students” (March 16, 2020); and “Supplemental Fact Sheet Addressing Serving Children with Disabilities During COVID-19 National Emergency” (March 21, 2020).

Accessibility

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education has stated: “‘Accessible’ refers to information or technology that, at a minimum, affords a person with a disability the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same programs and activities as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.”⁵ The technology that your student uses should support accessibility such as text to speech, speech to text, closed captions, and translation tools, and resources should include multiple media formats such as text, audio, and video. Content can be presented in short or longer format to accommodate attention spans and other disability-related needs.

QUESTIONS TO ASK TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

What technology tools, resources, and apps do you recommend for my child?

What educational enrichment websites do you recommend?

What audio books do you recommend for my child?

What assessments do you use to help us know where my child needs further instruction?

What should my child do if they finish their work quickly or if they are struggling with content?

If my child has a disability and needs additional support while learning remotely, are there assistive technology devices, services, or other resources that can assist my child?

Are the materials, technology tools, and applications that my child uses accessible while my child is learning remotely?

Are there culturally relevant materials and resources available to my child?

⁵ Resolution Agreement: South Carolina Technical College System, OCR Compliance Review No. 11-11-6002

RESOURCES



Guides with Tips and Tricks

- View other guides and resources funded by the U.S. Department of Education, including [Family Guide to At-Home Learning](#) from the Cedar Center, and [Parents: Supporting Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) from the IRIS Center.
- Find more [resources lists](#) compiled by Comprehensive Center Network, funded by the U.S. Department of Education.
- [Career Hacks for Workforce Readiness](#) increases learners' workforce readiness by building strengths in key interpersonal skills, such as problem solving, leadership, communication, teamwork and collaboration, and critical thinking (produced by WGBH).
- More information on personalized learning is available from organizations such as [Understood.org](#) and [KnowledgeWorks.org](#).
- Websites such as [Edutopia](#), [Understood.org](#), and state education departments offer helpful [family resources](#) to meet your child's needs at home.
- The U.S. Department of Education has also created useful resources for family learning at home. See [Talk, Read, and Sing Together Every Day!](#)
- Make the most of screen time. You can find out what's appropriate for your child's age, find tips on setting screen-time limits, and help your child develop positive habits with technology. Examples of how to do this can be found on [Common Sense Media](#), among others.

Digital Tools



- The U.S. Department of Education has also funded the creation of tools that help provide students flexibility in accessing educational resources. [Bookshare](#) helps make reading easier for people with reading barriers. [iCanConnect](#) provides educational equipment to people with significant vision or hearing loss.
- Here are [some examples](#) of learning apps, games, and websites for your kids by age from Common Sense Media.
- Hundreds of digital books by topic, grade, and language are available at, for example, [Unite for Literacy](#), [Storynory](#), [Lit2Go](#), and [Story Shares](#).
- [Hats & Ladders](#) uses proven game mechanics, up-to-date occupational data, and personalized instruction to empower teens and young adults with career-building experiences, skills, and opportunities.
- Accessibility is explained and features presented at [Apple Inc.](#), [Google](#), and [Microsoft](#).

Instructional Activities



- Summertime offers special learning opportunities, such as Summer Learning Week with the [National Summer Learning Association](#) and virtual math summer camp (available in English and Spanish) with [Camp Khan](#).

- [Khan Academy](#) offers sample home learning schedules with grade-level activities.
- Examples of learning activities designed for summer, but can be applicable at any time, are available at [EdNavigator: Resource Bundle on Summer Learning](#).
- Discover free learning activities online, such as a live webcam of the [National Zoo](#), [Smithsonian museums](#), [NASA's faraway place](#), or [how to do science experiments in the kitchen](#).
- Online resources and daily events are curated along with virtual field trips at [Wide Open School](#), among others.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD’S PROGRESS: COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING

This section in 30 seconds: The time it takes to master content and develop skills can be different from child to child; however, children learn best when the support they receive is customized for each new skill. In a competency-based system, students are empowered to make more decisions in their learning and, as a result, may be more engaged.

What is it? Competency-based learning (also known as performance-based, mastery-based, or proficiency-based education) is an approach in which the teacher builds a structure around the difference in pace of each student. The class is set up to ensure that students progress after showing mastery of the skills and competencies. For example, rather than a math teacher allowing only one week for all students to learn two-digit addition before moving on to a new topic, the teacher sets the expectation that each student will be able to solve two-digit math problems using addition, but that they can work at their needed pace to demonstrate mastery.

In this approach, teachers organize the learning environment to support the strengths, weaknesses, and unique abilities of each student who learn in different ways and at different paces. While each student is tracking their own progress, they are not alone in their learning. Students still work with their peers and get support from members of their learning community. Technology can help teachers (or parents) provide the variety of support that each student will need to progress and help students know when they have gained a specific competency.

Goals of Competency-based Education at a Glance:

- Students progress based on evidence they have learned a concept, not the amount of time they “sit” in the class.
- Students are empowered to make decisions about their learning, including how they will demonstrate what they learned.
- Assessment is a positive experience for students that provides timely, relevant, and actionable information.
- Students receive different support based on their individual learning needs.
- Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the learning experience.
- Expectations for learning are clear and measurable.

Why do some find it beneficial? A competency-based system can be particularly flexible in working with disruptions. Competency-based systems value flexible learning environments where learning may happen at different times and different spaces. The development of new skills can be independent of location and students have the ability to pause or move ahead with their learning as needed.

How can you support your child? Your child's school may not have adopted a full competency system, but the principles can still be beneficial for you in helping support your child's progress. You should work closely with your child's teacher to find out what is required for each subject and what you can do to support the mastery of key skills. Additionally, various websites which we have included below provide guidelines for assessing the development of your child. Finally, share what you have noticed about your child's progress to help their teachers know more about your child's strengths and needs.

QUESTIONS TO ASK TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

What are the learning expectations for this subject or academic year? Can you show me examples of grade-level work?

What can I do at home to help my child with grade-level class work? What resources do you recommend?

Is my child on track to promote to the next grade or graduate on time? If not, what can they do to get back on track?

In the case of school building closures, ask:

- Which assignments/activities are mandatory and which allow for choice/flexibility?
- What should my child do if they complete a task earlier than expected? What should my child do if they need more time?
- How can my child demonstrate and keep track of what they have learned and what they still need to learn?
- How will my child be graded?

RESOURCES

[Be A Learning Hero](#) is a website that provides resources to help keep your child on track including math, reading, life skills, planning for college, and more.

This [Readiness Check](#) allows you to see how your student has progressed with important math and reading skills. This tool also connects to books, videos, and other resources to help students review content they have learned and practice key skills.

[GreatSchools Milestones](#) show examples of grade-level reading, writing, and math skills.

The [NBC News Learn Parent Toolkit](#) shows examples of what important math, English, and social-emotional skills look like by age.

[Show What You Know: A Parent's Guide To The Global Shift to Competency](#) explains additional benefits of competency-based learning.

CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND: DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

This section in 30 seconds: Students are more engaged when parents and families are involved in education. Using digital learning resources provides new opportunities for your family to develop a strong partnership with your school. Technology can help you and your child stay connected to your local community, your child's school and teachers, and other parents and children.

Social emotional support from your local community

In a national survey of parents related to COVID-19, the top concern for parents during school closures is that their child is missing important social interactions at school and with friends (Learning Heroes, 2020). Emotions and social relationships are essential components of learning. Schools provide counseling services and community spaces and play a pivotal role in the social development and mental well-being of students.

If your school is providing instruction virtually or your child is learning from home, technology can help support social connections by providing multiple means of connection with teachers and peers. Consider these examples of ways technology can help. You and your child could:

- Hold video conferences to stay connected to teachers and peers.

- Take pictures of their work or their creations and share them with their teacher or classmates.

- Get to know their teacher and classmates better by exchanging pictures, stories, and special memories.

- Practice writing by sending letters and e-mails to friends and relatives.

- Set up virtual playdates for your younger child and make sure your older child has time to talk with friends.

- Set up video chats with grandparents and other family members.

Social connections can reduce the impact of stress while also helping children develop communication, problem-solving, and empathy skills. For example, time with friends helps your child build relationships and talk with others who understand and relate to their feelings.

Learning resources and support from your school community

Two-way communication with your school community is essential. Find the district website and learn where and when updates are posted. See if information from your child's teacher, including assignments, are posted online. Establish the best way for you to provide information or ask questions, through phone, e-mail, text messaging, or other means.

Virtual communication can help you:

- Better understand your child's progress and different subjects they are learning
- Learn about opportunities from device distribution to enrichment programs to exam preparation
- Know right away if there are any issues, academic or non-academic
- Share what you know works best to support your child

A recent study about the impacts of COVID-19 shows that the majority of parents nationally say they plan to share what they noticed about their child's learning during school closures with their child's teacher (Learning Heroes, 2020). Staying connected to school communities will help parents and families while better supporting their children in their learning environment moving forward.

Ways your child's teacher might use the technology available to them to facilitate connections and collaboration include:

- Having students share their projects and essays by creating a website or photo gallery of their work.
- Providing opportunities for students to share experiences, engage in digital class discussions and small group work, and support one another.
- Providing avenues for students to share questions, comments, and concerns that are related to instruction, as well as those related to how they are feeling.
- Making space for informal connections and personalized support by regularly scheduling a virtual meeting with you, your child, or both of you.

Tools supporting two-way family and school communication include the school website, video conferencing, phone, text messaging, email, online office hours, and online surveys.

Learning resources and support from beyond your local community

Your child can expand their community by connecting with other peers and educators outside their school, city, state, and country to share ideas and collaborate on projects. Technology can give your child opportunities to engage in research and problem-solving activities, including with other learners in their class or even around the world.

Access to virtual learning schools

Your child may benefit from virtual learning courses provided by your school, district, or state. This may include full courses that are self-paced, access to a virtual classroom that provides teachers, content, and assessments, or some combination. If your school is closed and/or the options that it provides do not meet the particular needs of your child, a virtual school may provide access to what your child needs to continue progressing through their courses.

Virtual learning refers to online learning that takes place outside of the school or brings what is outside of the school into the school. It uses an online environment to connect students who may be physically located in one place with a course or learning opportunity located somewhere else (CORE Education, 2020).

Some states have online K-12 schools that are operated by the state or district. These can be helpful during school building closures and even at other times. Online schools may offer courses that your child may not otherwise have in their schools, and, if necessary, can also help your child make up credits to continue toward graduation.

QUESTIONS TO ASK TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

How often will my child have a one-on-one check-in with their teacher or other school personnel?

When and where are important school and class updates posted?

What is the best way for me to provide information or ask questions? Through email, text message, or other means?

Who do I ask to provide me with an interpreter at the school?

Is there someone in the school who works with families?

What supports (e.g., a counselor) are available to help my child cope with their emotions and mental health?

Is there a virtual school option through my district or state? What courses are available?

RESOURCE



Guides with Tips and Tricks

- Learn more about family engagement from, for example, [Understood.org](#).
- The Institute for Education Sciences has created an introduction to [“Supporting young children’s learning and well-being at home: A COVID-19 resource for teachers, parents, and caregivers.”](#)
- Learn more about federal laws that apply to your local school through the [“Understanding the Every Student Succeeds Act: A Parent’s Guide to the Nation’s Landmark Education Law.”](#)
- Visit the [Home School Legal Defense Association](#) to learn more about connecting to the homeschooling community, including [state-level requirements](#) such as testing and mandatory subjects.
- [Learn](#) to help children and teenagers adapt to new circumstances and manage anxiety, stress, and boredom with podcasts, videos, and articles.
- Explore the value of [gratitude](#) to help your child develop empathy, improve sleep, and manage trauma.
- [The Ultimate Guide to Online School](#) is a resource that explains how to switch to online school if schools are closed and not offering instruction and you decide it’s the best option for your child.



Digital Tools

- Download a helpful [parent-teacher letter](#) from Prepared Parents.
- For grades K-8, using a tool, such as this [“Puzzle to Plan” tool](#), helps support home learning and home-to-school coordination. For high school, review subject and credit completion requirements with your child and create a plan together.
- [“The Reality of Virtual Schools”](#) from non-profit GreatSchools offers some things parents should know about the alternative to brick-and-mortar education.
- Find fun (and free) interactive resources to set your child up for success in the new school year and partner with teachers from [Learning Heroes](#) or other similar websites.

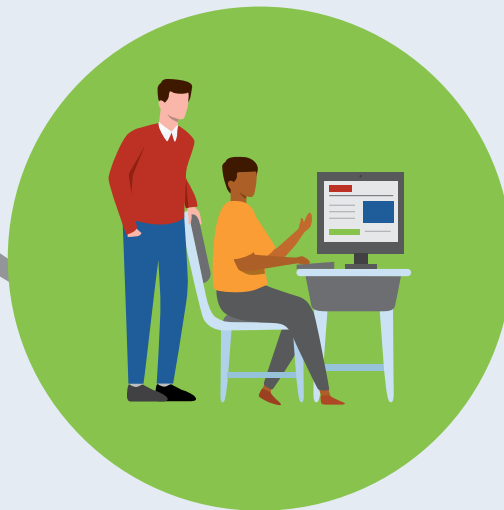
PART TWO

ENABLING DIGITAL LEARNING

INTERNET
ACCESS



PERSONAL
LEARNING
DEVICES



SAFETY, PRIVACY, AND
RESPONSIBILITY ONLINE

To take advantage of the benefits of digital learning, your child needs access to a personal learning device, such as a laptop, and access to the internet at home.

Ensuring access to a device and the internet also facilitates a more seamless transition between school and home. Your child can access online platforms that record progress and provide digital learning activities and resources.

Having full access is ideal, but we know this isn't the reality for everyone. If your child has no device (or only a smartphone), use the sections below as you find ways to obtain a device that will meet their learning needs.

ENSURING YOUR CHILD'S ACCESS: PERSONAL LEARNING DEVICES

In order for your student to have access to a personal learning device, several options may be available.

Learn about device distribution opportunities. Reach out to your child's teacher or counselor to ask about access to a digital device, such as a laptop or tablet. Even if you already have a computer at home, each child should have their own reliable device so they can fully participate in digital learning at the same time when needed.

Get technical support. Ask your school for support if you have trouble with the device or need help setting it up. Schools may be hosting virtual town halls or other events for parents and families.

Learning can take place offline, too. Ask your child's teacher or local library for activities students can do without a screen, so that they can continue learning if a device is not available and maximize meaningful use of screen time when a device is available.

ENSURING YOUR CHILD'S ACCESS: INTERNET SERVICE

Streaming and downloading content and participating in video conferences requires a high-speed, reliable internet connection. Although many public spaces offer internet access, obtaining access at home is critical for supporting continuity of learning. If you do not have access to the internet to support your child's learning, some options may be available to you.

Discover school- or community-provided internet access. Some schools provide internet hotspots for students to check out, and some communities have open access to a community-based network. Check with your school and public library to learn about options in your community. The resources section below provides additional sources for finding internet access options in your community.

Learn about your internet access. If you already have service, make sure it can support the increased online activity and that you understand any data limits (if applicable).

ENSURING YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY, PRIVACY, AND RESPONSIBILITY ONLINE

Get to know your rights and learn what information is being collected or shared about your child.

Your child should be learning safe and responsible online practices. We offer the sections below as helpful places to start discussing internet security and privacy with your child. Reach out to your school with questions or feedback.

Security Settings

Turn on the security features on any device your child may use for learning activities. These can be found in the device's general settings under the privacy menu. These features can:

- Restrict access to offensive or inappropriate content

- Require approval for downloads

- Limit time spent on certain apps

Digital Citizenship

Talk with your child about how to be a responsible digital citizen. Remind your child that virtual communities are an extension of their classrooms, and the same basic rules apply, such as treating others with respect. Let your child know that they should tell you, their teacher, or a family member if they or a classmate are being bullied or are worried about any troubling content, encounters, or activities online.

Password Management

Make sure you and your child have all the information to find their learning resources. Keep track of log-in and password information and URLs for each platform they use. Consider using a password manager in your internet browser or keep passwords written down in a safe place. Change passwords regularly.

Video Conferencing

Talk with your child's teacher if you aren't comfortable with your child using the video feature during virtual lessons. Many platforms allow you to use virtual backgrounds or images to protect the privacy of your home. If the school plans to record a lesson or take screenshots during a lesson and you are uncomfortable, ask if your child can be off-camera or watch the recorded lesson later.

Privacy Policies

Keep in mind that many schools have different agreements with companies to protect the privacy of students, and checking with your school is always an important first step. Schools may use certain digital learning tools without your consent as long as the use of these tools aligns with state and federal law.

Federal Laws Governing Privacy and Safety: FERPA, IDEA, and COPPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, known as FERPA, is a federal law that, among other things, generally prohibits FERPA-covered educational agencies (e.g., school districts) and institutions (i.e., schools) from disclosing personally identifiable information (PII) from the education records of a student without the prior written consent of the student's parent or the "eligible student" herself or himself (i.e., the student if he or she is 18 years or older or attends an institution of postsecondary education).⁶ FERPA also generally provides parents and eligible students with the right to inspect and review their education records, and the right to seek to amend information in their education records that is inaccurate, misleading, or in violation of the student's rights of privacy.⁷ For more information regarding FERPA, please visit the U.S. Department of Education's Student Privacy Policy Office's website at: <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov>.

Of note, the U.S. Department of Education recently released guidance to parents on FERPA in April of 2020 entitled, "The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act: Guidance for Parents," which is available at https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/FERPAGuidanceForParents.pdf.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) also protects PII in education records of children with disabilities eligible under the IDEA, and generally requires the prior consent of the parent for disclosure of PII to third parties. The IDEA generally incorporates the FERPA exceptions to the prior written consent requirement. The U.S. Department of Education released guidance to parents on FERPA in April of 2020.

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, known as COPPA, generally gives parents control over what information is collected about their children online. Under COPPA, schools may in certain circumstances provide consent on behalf of parents to the collection of student personal information. The FTC recently clarified, "Schools can consent on behalf of parents to the collection of student personal information—but only if such information is used for a school-authorized educational purpose and for no other commercial purpose. This is true whether the learning takes place in the classroom or at home at the direction of the school." Guidance from the FTC is available at: <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/blogs/business-blog/2020/04/coppa-guidance-ed-tech-companies-schools-during-coronavirus>.

⁶ 20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g(b), (h), (i), and (j), and 34 CFR Part 99, Subpart D. FERPA contains specific exceptions to this general consent requirement which are set forth in 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1)-(b)(3), (b)(5), (b)(6), (h), (i) and (j), and 34 CFR § 99.31.

⁷ 20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g(a)(1)(A) and (a)(2), and 34 CFR Part 99, Subparts B and C

QUESTIONS TO ASK TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

What apps or websites are being used in my child's classroom?

- Do they require students to have an account?
- How do I keep track of usernames and passwords?
- What data (information) about my child does the platform receive when my child uses the app or website?
- How is my child's information secured?
- How is my child protected from distracting or inappropriate content online?

Are there forms to sign to give consent for my child to use digital learning tools?

How does the school manage privacy policies of applications being used for learning?

Will my child with an IEP or special education services be supported over video? If so, will it be recorded? Who will have access to the recording, and how long will it be stored?

Will my English Learner (EL) be supported over video? What additional resources or language accommodations will be available for my child?

Does your school's website have sections discussing student privacy policies and what education technology is being used?

RESOURCES



Guides with Tips and Tricks

- Help your child build a positive online identity. Check out the resources on [Learning Keeps Going](#), which has guides and tips for developing a positive online identity.
- Reinforce that online actions matter. What your child posts, writes, and likes becomes permanent. Find more tips from Google at [Be Internet Awesome](#).
- Build your child's digital citizenship skills with family tips and activities from [Common Sense Digital Citizenship resources](#) organized by grade level in Spanish and English.
- [StopBullying.gov](#) provides information and tips for preventing and handling cyberbullying.
- Meeting in virtual classrooms can help students stay connected to their school community, but it's still important for parents to make sure their online interactions are safe. Check out these [tips from Common Sense Media](#) for knowing who your child is talking with online.
- The Future of Privacy Forum maintains a list of developers who have signed the [Student Privacy Pledge](#).
- The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) was enacted by Congress in 2000 to address concerns about children's access to obscene or harmful content over the internet, and a [consumer guide](#) provides information on how to protect your child.

- For additional information on online safety concerns and ways of protecting your child online, see “[Cyber Safety Considerations for K-12 Schools and School Districts.](#)”



Digital Tools

- You can find free or low-cost internet service options in your area using the zip code search tool at [EveryoneOn](#) or explore the options compiled and explained by the [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#).
- [Wide Open School](#) offers digital training, as well as great online and offline learning resources and events for students of all ages.
- Download a browser plug-in that limits tracking and advertisements to protect your child’s information. Tools like [Adblock Plus](#) and [Disconnect](#) provide step-by-step instructions.
- Websites like [Polisis](#) publish privacy policies for apps or websites your child might be using. [Common Sense Media](#) may have reviewed the tool’s privacy policies and practices.

HOW TO FILE A DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT WITH THE OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student’s right to learn in a safe environment free from discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Discrimination on the bases of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance); and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975.

These civil rights laws extend to all state education agencies, elementary and secondary school systems, colleges and universities, vocational schools, proprietary schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, libraries and museums that receive federal financial assistance from ED. Programs or activities that receive ED funds must provide aids, benefits, or services in a nondiscriminatory manner in an environment free from discriminatory harassment that limits educational opportunities. Such aids, benefits, or services may include, but are not limited to, admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student treatment and services, counseling and guidance, discipline, classroom assignment, grading, vocational education, recreation, physical education, athletics, housing, and employment.

Anyone who believes that an education institution that receives federal financial assistance has discriminated against someone on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age may file a complaint with OCR. The person or organization filing the complaint need not be a victim of the alleged discrimination but may complain on behalf of another person or group. Generally, a complaint must be filed within 180 calendar days of the date of the alleged discrimination. Complainants may file a complaint by mail or facsimile with the appropriate

regional office (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/addresses.html>), e-mail (ocr@ed.gov), or by using OCR's electronic complaint form (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>).

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document contains resources that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

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