

Considerations for State, District, School Leaders per Parent Communications

The dramatic change in routine will affect parents and families in a myriad of ways. The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is stressful and each family is managing this crisis in different ways.

Tips on Technology Communication with Parents

- The most important point in these first few days or weeks is to emphasize relationships, establish a presence and not sending out volumes of content. Once your district has established remote learning, offer a way to check in with students. If your district is using a video conference tool, this can be a very effective way students, especially students with disabilities, can see their educators and know that everyone is okay.
- Review and communicate the district policy on student privacy for technology use. There have been emergency changes to policies on [HIPAA](#) and [FERPA](#) that may affect the district policy, be sure parents understand any changes.
- Communicate clearly with parents the eLearning platform, apps, or software the district will be using. There should be one primary point of contact at the school for parents regarding technology-related questions. There should be coordination in the school/district on how much technology information goes to families.
- Run communication that goes to parents through a readability checker such as [readable](#). All critical communication should be in plain language. Materials should be translated into first languages used by families in the district.
- Communicate the structure of the day and how eLearning is going to happen. This includes expectations by role, who and when students will be meeting with, what support person at home is needed. It will be important for general education teachers, special education teachers, para-professionals, and specialists to agree to a consistent structure. For example, if a student has an IEP scheduled time with specialists should use the same structures and technologies so parents do not have to learn new technology with every interaction.
- Parents will likely need an opportunity or several to be shown how the technology their child/children are supposed use works, not simply told about it. Most useful is for parents to have a website or central location to go to for technology support. Additionally, if possible support people with phone numbers they can go to for help. Invite their questions, many parents will not ask because they think they should know. A student's success will likely depend on their parent(s) understanding what is going on, how a technology works, and what the purpose is of using that technology.
- Provide parents with an opportunity to ask plain language questions about whether a technology will work for their child, especially if that child uses assistive technology. Most

parents will not know what accessibility means. To help them identify whether a technology or digital content will work for their child, encourage them to ask¹:

- Can users perform all functions without a mouse?
- If it supports audio, does it support captions?
- If it produces output, is the output accessible?
- Is accessibility documentation available?
- Has it been tested using assistive technologies?
- If so, which AT? What was your method? What were your findings? Who did the testing?

(For more information on accessibility review [SETDA eLearning Accessibility Resources](#) and a short video series from the [National Center on Accessible Educational Material](#)).

- Finally, remember communication is a two-way street. Encourage feedback from parents, they are now the eyes and ears to the learning experience students are having. Parents may have other things competing for their time and therefore a varied amount of ability to support the student. The stress levels for all families is going to be higher than normal, but with two-way communication what's working and the challenges will be clearer for districts to respond appropriately.

Important Considerations Regarding Parents of Children with Disabilities

- The district remains responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services with an individualized education program (IEP). Review the [Questions and Answers](#) document provided by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The [Office of Civil Rights](#) has reaffirmed this obligation.
- Know the assistive technologies being used by students in the district. Just like classroom technology, assistive technologies should be tested for interoperability with the district technology being used for general curriculum during eLearning Days. The online curriculum needs to be accessible to work with assistive technology.

Resources

[What Parents Need to Know About the Coronavirus](#)

[State Departments of Ed Tech](#)

[AT Act Projects](#)

[Understood: Video and Distance Education - 6 UDL Best Practices](#)

¹ Questions Adapted from Terrill Thompson Washington State University Do-IT Center