

Guide to Extending Learning During School Closures

Unprecedented school closures due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) are sending many educators into uncharted territory. In this short guide, we've gathered tips and resources for communicating with staff, students, and parents and for building and implementing a plan for e-learning to keep students on track during both long- and short-term school closures.



Understand Technology Access

The first step to determining if and how your students will continue their learning while away from school is to understand whether they have access to an Internet connection and a device that they can use to access online learning materials, communications, and possibly live online learning experiences. Use this information to determine how to deploy e-learning and whether you will need to distribute devices and/or Internet hotspots to ensure that all students have equitable access.

The easiest way to do this is to send out a short survey to parents. If your school or district does not already have a survey tool in place, consider using a free tool such as Google Forms. The survey does not need to be complicated; in fact, if you are working within a tight timeline, you'll likely get more participation if your survey is short and simple.

Consider including these three questions in your survey:

- 1 In the event of a school closure, will your learner have access to a device and an Internet connection to participate in online learning activities and receive communication from teachers?



YES



NO

- 2 What type of internet-connected device will your learner have access to?



1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

- 3 Will your students need to share devices?

Each student will have a device to use

Two students will share one device

More than two students will share one device



If many of the students don't have access to an Internet connection at home, and your district isn't able to provide hotspots or devices to all students who need them, consider reaching out to local libraries, community organizations, or businesses for help.

Take Inventory of Your Current Resources

As you move forward with putting together a plan for e-learning, start by taking inventory of the online programs that your district currently uses to determine how they can fit into your online learning plan.

Sample Audit Worksheet

Program Features			
Resource Type ■ Skill Practice ■ Instruction ■ Supplemental Learning ■ Assessment			
How many licenses are available for students?			
Which grade levels can use the program?			
Do teachers know how to use the program?			
Do students know how to use the program?			
Is it possible to get staff and students up and running on the program before the school closure?			

Use your online learning resource audit to determine whether you currently have the sufficient online learning tools to deploy e-learning, or whether you need to obtain more resources. As you explore your options, consider free learning tools such as Khan Academy and TeacherTube, resources featuring the capability for teachers to record video lessons themselves to share with students, and online learning programs that can be purchased.



How Edmentum Can Help

The recent reports of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) have led to the closure of many schools and districts globally. Edmentum takes this situation very seriously, and we are committed to helping you prepare for what's next. We are offering a variety of free resources to schools and districts affected by this closure. Learn more on our [program access resource page](#).

Establish a Daily Schedule

Moving from the structure of a traditional classroom to the flexibility of learning in an online environment can be challenging for students and parents. Set up a schedule to give students guidance on how to spend their time. As you plan the schedule, you will also need to determine how much time students will spend in synchronous activities —interacting with their teacher and peers in real time— versus asynchronous activities, working independently at their own pace. The proportion of synchronous to asynchronous activities will impact the flexibility students and teachers have within the schedule. The more households within your district communities in which students will be sharing devices, the greater proportion of asynchronous activities your schedule will need to include.

Be sure that your schedule includes:



Check-ins:

If students will mostly be working asynchronously, be sure to build time into the schedule for them to check in with their teacher and peers. Consider scheduling a morning meeting in which the teacher can review with students what they will be working on for the day, provide direct instruction, or engage the class in a discussion or even a game. Also consider including an additional short, daily afternoon check-in to discuss progress, answer questions, and share announcements. When scheduling check-ins be sure to stagger the times for different grade levels to accommodate households with shared devices. For hosting the check-ins, consider tools like Zoom, which has a free version, and Google Hangouts Meet.



Office hours:

Office hours are times during the day that the teacher will be online and available to connect live with students to answer questions and provide tutoring, intervention, or other instructional support. As with check-ins, the number of office hours that teachers need to host will depend on how much time students will be working synchronously versus asynchronously. The more students will be working asynchronously, the more office hours teachers will need to offer to support students.



It's unlikely that students will be able to complete the amount of work that they would normally do during an on-campus school day. Younger students may not be able to receive support from an adult at home, and older students may have limited time for schoolwork due to having to babysit younger siblings.

Establish a Daily Schedule



Breaks:

Just as students need to take breaks while at school, they also need to be sure to take breaks from working online. Build short breaks into the schedule and be sure that parents and students understand why it's important to take them so that they take advantage of that time away from devices.



Physical activity:

Physical activity is built into the school day for most students through P.E. class and recess. Build a time for physical activity into your e-learning day schedule, and provide suggested activities for students to complete to make sure they are getting adequate and appropriate physical activity.



Subject Blocks:

Block time during the day for students to work on certain subjects. For longer term closures, consider longer subject blocks every other day to allow students longer periods of focused time.



Catch-up time:

Students will inevitably have an activity that they are unable to complete in the time allotted. Building a block of about 30 minutes into the daily schedule for catching up will help students stay on track.



Create an attendance policy:

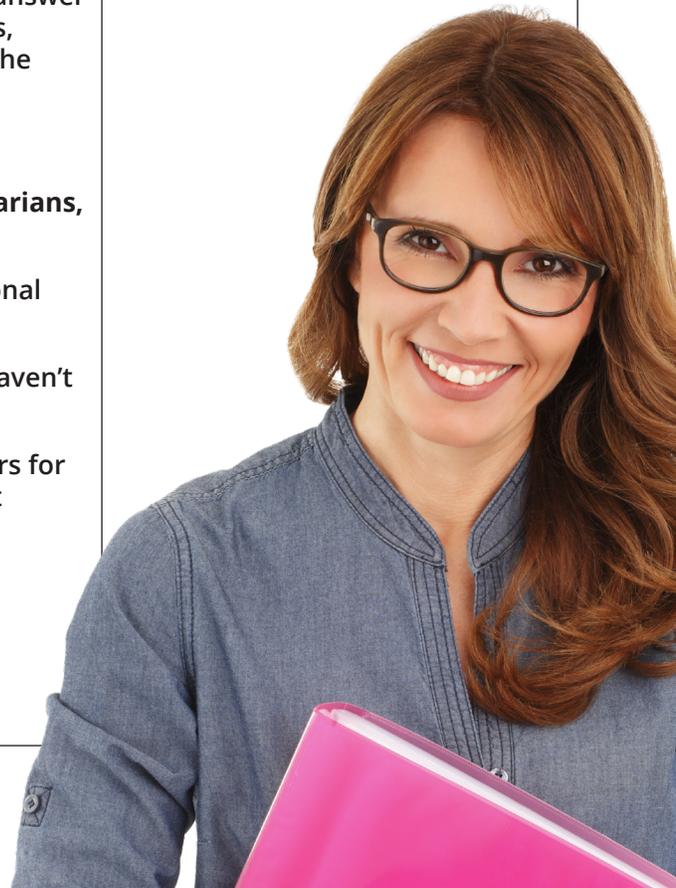
For your e-learning days to count toward state-mandated attendance requirements, be sure to develop a policy for determining attendance. Some districts consider students present if they complete a certain percentage of the day's assignments; for other districts, students are considered present when they attend scheduled synchronous activities. Whatever method you develop, make sure that it is in compliance with state guidelines.

Set Expectations for Staff

It's important to set clear expectations for teachers and other staff members about their duties during the school closure. Administrators, teachers, and other staff members should work together to define expectations and then publish a resource that details what specific tasks staff members in each role should complete in order to carry out the learning plan and comply with school, district, and state guidelines for e-learning days.

Sample Expectations Chart

Teachers	Administration and Support	Other District Staff
<p>All Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Post activities to Google Classroom by 8:30 AM ■ Prepare online lessons ■ Hold office hours each day ■ Submit attendance based on assignments completed <p>ESL, GT, Special Education Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide accommodations based on IEP goals ■ Provide feedback to students ■ Partner with classroom teachers to provide additional assignments ■ Provide instructional support to parents and students 	<p>Principals, Assistant Principals, Central Office Administration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure communication of school closure ■ Engage in online planning meetings ■ Engage in professional learning ■ Support and monitor teachers ■ Maintain availability to answer questions from teachers, students, parents, and the community <p>Instructional Coaches, Librarians, Administrative Assistants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide online professional learning ■ Contact students who haven't completed work ■ Collaborate with teachers for communication support 	<p>Paraprofessionals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collaborate with classroom teachers to support online learning <p>Bus Drivers, Food Service, School Nurses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participate in online professional learning sessions



Prepare Students and Staff for E-Learning

Set aside time for staff training

Even the most tech savvy teachers need training on effectively teaching and communicating with students and parents in a fully online environment. You may feel like you don't have time for staff training, but if school must close for an extended period of time, the time spent on training will be well worth it. While conducting a training of at least one full day in person with faculty will work best, if your school closure is imminent or has already begun, host a full day online training, along with shorter follow-up sessions in the ensuing days to make sure teachers are equipped to support students.

Be sure to include these topics in your teacher training:

- Using the online learning programs that the district will be using
- Best practices for keeping students and parents engaged during online learning
- Best practices for teaching in an online environment
- Logistics and schedule for the e-learning plan

Prepare students and parents for learning at home

E-learning can't be successful unless students and parents know what is expected of them and know how to access their online assignments and resources. If school is still in session, have educators walk students through logging in to their online platforms and accessing their assignments. Your district could also host an on-campus e-learning practice day in which students work through the e-learning day assignments on the e-learning day schedule. The more practice that students have, the more likely they will be successful at home.

Once your e-learning plan is in place, share the details with parents and students. In your communication be sure to include:

- Online learning platform logins
- Instructions for accessing online programs
- A daily schedule
- Attendance policies
- Assignment completion expectations



In addition to communicating policies to parents through notes sent home, email, and text messages, host live webinars in which staff members can explain policies, demonstrate online programs, and answer questions live. Parents will appreciate having the additional details and the ability to have their questions answered, and you will be able to share the recording so that parents who were not able to attend live still have access to the information.

Communicate with Staff and Parents

An unexpected school closure will require communication breadth and frequency that you may not be accustomed to. Use any and all available channels to keep students, parents, and community members informed.

Here are tips and best practices for using different communication tools:



Phone system: If you have an automatic call system in place, call or text families with updates as they are available. This is the best way to distribute a time-sensitive message, and it will likely have the most reach because nearly all families have telephones, even those who don't have Internet service.



Email: Concise, direct emails are one of the best ways to communicate with families and staff members. Those who use email will check it frequently in search of updates. Focus on clear and compelling subject lines and email headers to improve the chances that recipients open and read the message. Also include a clear and prominent call to action if there is something that the reader or recipient needs to do. In every email you send, be sure to include links to your website or other resources where more information can be found.



Website: Your website will be the first place most families go for information. Use an eye-catching callout near the top of the homepage and link to a webpage that contains relevant news and updates. To limit frustration and confusion, make sure that visitors don't have to search for what they are looking for.

Website tips:

1

Keep content updated.

2

Consolidate content into easy-to-understand sections.

3

Make the menu options intuitive and easy.

4

Include contact information for personnel families should reach out to for more information.

Communicate With Staff and Parents



Social media:

Utilizing the power of social media to share information about a school closure can be incredibly effective if educators and families follow your district's social media accounts. Through the power of easy sharing, messages can travel far very quickly. One thing to keep in mind when leveraging social media is that you will receive inquiries through those channels, so it's important to have someone available to monitor the accounts and respond to questions and requests. If your district has not built an audience through social media, you may still want to post information to those accounts; just be aware that you will also need to use other methods of communication.

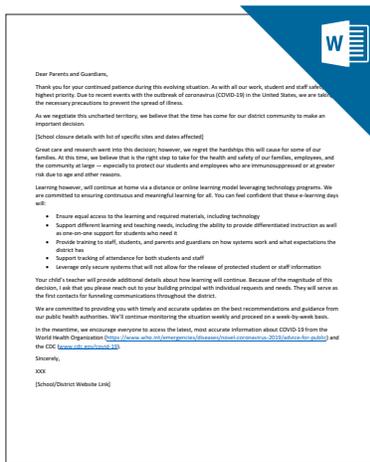
Letter Template:

We've put together three letter templates specifically for communicating about closures related to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). These are available in Microsoft Word so that you can customize them for your specific needs.



Letter Template

Communicate with Teachers & Staff



Letter Template

Communicate with Parents, Migration to eLearning



Letter Template

Communicate with Parents, Closing Announcement Only