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Across the country, elementary, secondary and postsecondary schools have closed as part of the effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 (the coronavirus). Each week, IDRA will issue an update on the impact of COVID-19-related policies on schools, students and families.

More resources and trainings for teachers, school administrators, families and communities are on our [Learning Goes On website](#).

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Equity Resources for Online Learning



Ensuring Equity in Online Learning – Considerations in Response to COVID-19's Impact on Schooling

In the wake of the COVID-19-related public health crisis, schools around the nation are turning to online learning for students. Technology presents a huge opportunity to engage students to continue their schooling.

However, online education also brings a host of equity and access concerns, misconceptions around students' technology abilities, and unique challenges for some student populations, including special education students and English learners.

This special edition issue brief provides educators ideas on how technology can best serve us during these times. The following suggestions rely on best educational practices, logical conclusions drawn from school district equity audits and classroom observations, research on technology access, and our collective empathy toward families and students.

See our Best Practices for Online Instruction Supplement: IDRA//eNews/2020

Ensure Internet Access for Students

Online education does not work when students cannot access it. Many students do not have access to the internet, laptops or tablets necessary for full participation in online courses or activities. Pew Research Center analyzed 2013 U.S. Census Bureau data. Findings (2018):

- 53% of households with school-aged children do not have a high-speed internet connection at home.
- One in four teens whose annual family income is less than \$30,000 does not have access to a home computer and
- 37% of teens often or sometimes are unable to do their homework due to a lack of access to a computer or the internet.

Many students do have access to the internet through their cell phones, but competing technologies through the phone can be extremely difficult. While conference practice online (Zoom, Google Hangouts) and online video streaming are the most interactive components of online education, they can't burn through a phone data plan in one day, leaving many students to search for a Wi-Fi spot. Also, many students have no access to a printer.

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Best Practices for Online Instruction in the Wake of COVID-19

As schools across the country move to some form of online learning for students in response to COVID-19, there is great diversity in how schools are implementing their online programs. As a resource, IDRA has compiled this listing of researched-based strategies for K-12 educators.

Set Up Educator Collaborations

Issues with implementing online courses can be shared by having teachers form groups and collaboratively develop the most effective ways to teach their students material online. Additionally, campus leaders and technology specialists should be critical for teachers developing courses to help work through any technical issues and update software and process knowledge (Oliver, et al., 2020). Teachers generally prefer on-site support for technology use as opposed to phone-based assistance, so in the context of social distancing requirements, online videoconferencing may provide the best alternative for in-person support.

Encourage Student Collaboration

Online courses provide the best outcomes when educators encourage students to work together in understanding the content and meeting assignments (Dunbar Research, 2020). Collaborative assignments encourage further development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Additionally, sessions where large groups of students can speak and interact either via chat or in a blended classroom setting, tend to work better for young learners (Oliver, et al., 2020).

Focus on Active Learning

Even the most dynamic lecture can be less appealing in an online setting. Engaging students who are not in a room together should include a mix of short discussions, small group chats and projects, video and audio clips, and feedback responses with the best plan. (2011; Johnson, 2012; O'Malley, 2013). Base content delivery on discussion models that engage learners (Liu & Zheng, 2017).

Use Multimedia for Young Learners

Students who are not good reading readers, or who may have difficulty navigating online, learn more designed for high school and college students, benefit from lessons that incorporate video and audio content (Oliver, et al., 2020).

Break Lessons into Bite-size Chunks

Long lectures are not the best way to engage with students, especially online. Avoid pages and pages of text or an hour-long video lecture. Work to break

down the information in 15-minute chunks that allow students to work with the material they have learned in smaller, active segments. Suggestions for chunking lessons also include designing lessons with ample white space, breaking up text with photographs and examples, and incorporating color in any visual text sections (Oliver, et al., 2020; O'Malley, 2013). Courses that are visually appealing are more engaging for students (Dunbar Research, 2020).

Maintain Continued Teacher Presence

It is vitally important that educators are mentally present for their students' not to simply responding to questions students post online, but to actively communicating with students (O'Malley, 2013; Beasley & Beck, 2017). Instructors should be aware of student progress as they complete assignments and continue to facilitate discussions and checks to make sure that learners are actively engaged (Oliver, 2011; Hancock Research, 2020).

Provide Individualized Education

If students are struggling or have special needs that cannot be met through a normal lesson, educators should take care to engage these students and deliver content in a way that best suits their needs (Hancock Research, 2020). Successful education online available data, use appropriate assessments for their students, and change instruction to suit unique needs (O'Malley, et al., 2008; Beasley & Beck, 2017).

Build Authentic Family Engagement

Online courses can make it difficult to gauge education and any potential issues a student may have with coursework. Educators should have a genuine relationship with their students' families and guardians to keep up motivation and ensure that students work through and complete assignments (Johnson, 2012).

Set Clear Communication Policies

Educators and students should stay in touch, and the policies should responding to student or parent communications should be understood by all parties. For example, teachers can (Oliver, 2011; Hancock, 2020):

- Answer student emails within 24 hours.
- Initiate phone calls with each student at least once a week.
- Have weekly progress checks for each student.
- Actively facilitate student discussions.
- Call parents or guardians at least once a month, and

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Best Practices for Online Instruction in the Wake of COVID-19

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COVID-19 Policy Update

Testing for Students in Texas & Equity Implications

Texas Governor Greg Abbott waived the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) requirements for the 2019-20 school year and instructed the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to request a waiver for federal testing requirements from the U.S. Department of Education. TEA, State Board of Education, and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board are posting guidance on these changes on a daily basis. Here is the most important information about testing, as of March 20, 2020.

How have testing requirements changed?

All STAAR assessments have been cancelled, including:

- Grades 3-8: Reading and Mathematics
- Grades 4 and 7: Writing
- Grades 5 and 8: Science
- Grade 8: Social Studies
- End-of-Course exams
- STAAR Alternate 2 assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities

Each district will determine whether fifth and eighth graders should advance to the next grade. TEA has instructed districts to consider teacher recommendations, course grades and

other academic information to make this determination.

End-of-course (EOC) assessments for high school students are waived. Graduating seniors who still have EOCs to complete will be assessed by their school's Individual Graduation Committee (IGC). These committees evaluate whether students have mastered a particular subject. Learn more about IGCs and how they work from [IDRA's IGC issue brief and infographic](#).

How will schools monitor students' progress while they are learning from home?

STAAR Interim Assessments are online testing instruments that will be available to school districts at no cost until May 29, 2020. However, these assessments do not cover all subjects for all grades. Teachers and school districts that continue to serve students will likely have to determine how to track student progress and ensure that learning continues while schools are closed. Schools must expand their knowledge and use of assessment methods that do not rely on one measure to determine student achievement.

How will assessment changes impact English learners?

As part of its waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education, TEA asked for a waiver from federal progress assessment requirements for English learners. Districts still have the option to administer the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) to students until May 29.

TEA has not yet released specific guidance and resources about how schools can meet the instructional and assessment needs of English learners while schools are closed. The agency has announced that it is developing recommendations for alternative methods to determine language proficiency.

Many school districts are releasing learning resources online and in hard copy form to all students. These materials may be difficult for many families to access, including the families of English learners who may not have reliable, affordable internet services for even a brief period of time. Additionally, in-person listening and speaking are critical components of effective language programs. Without these communication options, many at-home learning methods developed for English learners will be insufficient.

What are the changes to Advanced Placement (AP) courses and college admissions tests?

The AP program is developing online testing, which will be available to students in May. Before then, free, online resources and review sessions will be made available.

The March and May SAT tests have been cancelled (a decision made by the College Board). All registered students will receive a refund.

The April 4 ACT has been postponed to June 13.

The Texas Education Agency will extend college preparation assessment reimbursements to cover tests administered during the summer.



Don't Block Graduation Because of a Test

Set Policies to Allow School Officials to Consider Other Factors Like Class Grades and Attendance

This brief focuses on how the State of Texas can improve its public education system through more equitable high school graduation requirements and by examining additional information that the legislature can consider in evaluating the current alternate assessment for graduation. In summary, we recommend that the State of Texas do the following:

- Eliminate the graduation requirement that students must pass high school exit exams. Instead, use interim, valid, reliable and formative standardized testing for diagnostic purposes to improve learning.
- Limit testing to the subjects required under the Texas Student Success Act – that is, eliminate the English I and U.S. History end-of-course exams.
- Reconstruct the state's testing system to require formative assessment that is used and reliable for all learners to monitor student learning and give ongoing feedback for teachers to improve their instruction (as opposed to summative testing that can be used in punitive ways that hurt children).
- To the extent permissible, eliminate testing through a representative sampling of students capable of capturing the performance of students by race, ethnicity, english, ability, socioeconomic status, language disability, and other student group characteristics identified for educational purposes across Texas.



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What is the impact of these changes on equitable access to education for all students?

Significant educational equity issues existed before COVID-19. Generations of students of color, poor students, English learners and students with disabilities have not had access to the resources, instructional materials, high-quality teachers and facilities they need. These inequities will persist and perhaps worsen during the current public health and economic crisis. We must remain watchful and involved in our schools and communities to ensure all students have access to learning opportunities and life's necessities.

Education agencies and school districts across the country can do the following...

- Ensure sustained and equitable access to coursework, instruction, activities and assessments in a variety of modes and formats.
- Provide instructional supports and resource repositories for teachers so that all districts can continue to serve students.
- Continue to engage families with updated messaging on health and safety practices, Census 2020 outreach, and supplemental educational materials.
- Ensure that waivers do not negatively impact the civil rights of students.
- Limit waivers and adaptations only to those that are necessary to ensure the health and safety of school communities.
- Provide clear guidance to teachers on the most effective ways to support students with specific educational needs, including English learners.

Links for more information

The [School Meal Finder](#) provides information about where students can access meals

TEA's [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Support and Guidance](#)

TEA [Notice to School Administrators about Student Assessments](#)

TEA [Assessment Guidance](#) (updated March 19, 2020)

The [College Board's SAT Coronavirus Updates](#), including access to free, online practice tests and resources and information about AP testing

The [ACT April 2020 National Exam COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Free Webinar Series

IDRA Launches Free Webinar Series on Equitable Practices for Online Learning

IDRA is actively developing webinars and digital workshops for

educators to continue student learning during this unprecedented event.

The first episode, **Equitable Practices for Teaching Online**, aired today and will soon be available on-demand.

Sign up now for the next episode: **Tools & Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap** on Tuesday, March 24, 2020 @ 2:00 pm (cst)

REGISTER NOW



Webinar Schedule

Equitable Practices for Teaching Online
Friday, March 20, 2020 @ 2:00 pm (cst)

Tools & Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap
Tuesday, March 24, 2020 @ 2:00 pm (cst)

More coming soon!
Register at <https://idra.news/WebinarSeries>



Equity Connection IDRA's Online Community of Practice

Join IDRA's free online community of practice

IDRA's **Equity Connection** is a place for educators, researchers, parents and community. We've added a forum focused on the COVID-19-propelled public health crisis and its affect on schooling.



Online Technical Assistance Academies for School Districts

Get help implementing equitable and effective online education!

As schools shut down and head for uncertain times, IDRA is offering multi-day online academies to assist districts in providing equitable and excellent education in online settings. The academies will be held using a web conference platform easily available to your teachers and will consist of one planning day with district and campus leaders and four

professional development and technical assistance days with instructional coaches and teachers. The cost ranges from \$10,000 to \$50,000 depending on district size and needs. Contact IDRA for more information: contact@idra.org.

A promotional graphic for IDRA Anytime Teacher Academies. The background is a blurred image of a chalkboard with a globe and some diagrams. In the foreground, there is a wooden desk with a metal pencil holder containing several colorful pencils and a stack of books. A dark blue rectangular box with a white border is centered on the left side of the graphic. Inside this box, the title "IDRA Anytime Teacher Academies" is written in white. Below the title, there is a short paragraph and a bulleted list of five topics. At the bottom left of the box is a small white horizontal line. At the bottom left of the entire graphic is the IDRA logo, which includes the text "Children First" above "IDRA" and "Transforming Education" below it. At the bottom right of the graphic is the text "Contact IDRA for pricing: <https://idra.news/LearningGoesOn>".

IDRA Anytime Teacher Academies

IDRA provides on-demand video tutorial sessions designed to build educator capacity on such topics as...

- Online project-based learning across the curriculum for online delivery
- Delivering an equitable culturally-relevant science lesson using Google Apps
- Delivering an equitable culturally-relevant math lesson using the Explain Everything App
- Authentic student and family engagement in a COVID-19 reality
- Building a teacher website with Google Sites

Children First
IDRA
Transforming Education

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IDRA Anytime Leadership Academies

IDRA provides on-demand recorded video sessions designed to build district and school leadership capacity on such topics as...

- Adjusting the school year and daily instruction
- Rethinking the school year to meet instructional goals
- How to prepare for the 2020-21 school year given the length of school closures
- Converting lessons for online platforms
- How teacher teams can collaborate online
- How teachers can ensure students are on track for the next school year
- How districts can support a parent or guardian who is tutoring their students
- Supporting teachers at home
- Ensuring digital inclusion with strategies like Wi-Fi busses, providing access to devices and hotspots, and campus courtyards

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The Intercultural Development Research Association is an independent private non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring educational opportunity for every child. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.

IDRA works hand-in-hand with hundreds of thousands of educators and families each year in communities and classrooms around the country. All our work rests on an

unwavering commitment to creating self-renewing schools that value and promote the success of students of all backgrounds.