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Association**IDRA****Learning  
Goes On****A COVID-19 Resource for Education**

April 9, 2020 Edition

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 issues 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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We welcome donations to support education during this COVID-19 crisis.

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## Policy Update

# Policy Recommendations to Address Equity Concerns for English Learners in Response to COVID-19

As COVID-19 has disrupted almost all aspects of our society, state governments and the federal administration have rushed to respond to the educational impacts of the pandemic. Yet, these responses have not fully accounted for the implications of the virus on equity in education for English learners.

English learners are a large and growing portion of our country's elementary and secondary school students. English learners make up about 10% of the U.S. student population and a growing proportion of students in the South. For example, in Texas, public schools educate over 1 million students designated as English learners, whose families speak over 130 languages. (U.S. Department of Education, 2020b; Sugarman, 2016; TEA, 2018)

Throughout our country's history, many English learners had little or no access to high-quality, equitable education. Federal legislation for bilingual education in 1968 came after decades of schools segregating students whose home language was any other than English. For instance, educators across the Southwest physically punished students for speaking Spanish, segregated them into different classrooms or into completely separate and dilapidated facilities, and conflated language needs with special education status by tracking students away from general education classrooms (Miguel & Valencia, 1998).

Since then, several court decisions led to requirements for all schools serving English learners to provide some specialized instruction that is specifically adapted to address their needs (e.g., *Lau vs. Nichols*, 1974; *Castañeda vs. Pickard*, 1983). Educators draw on decades of research on effective policies and strategies for serving English learners (Cortez & Villarreal, 2009; Robledo Montecel, & Cortez, 2001).

Times of chaos, such as a pandemic or natural disaster, intensify and expose the daily inequities that English learners encounter in schools. For example, English learners experienced greater segregation in the New Orleans school system after Hurricane Katrina than before the storm (Weixler, et al., 2017). And families who speak any number of other languages may have difficulty accessing up-to-date information, educational materials, and resources.

The U.S. Department of Education, Congress and state education agencies issued guidelines that evolve daily for how schools should respond to COVID-19 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a; TEA, 2020). However, at the time of writing, the federal administration has not issued clear guidelines on distance-learning for effective bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) in response to the COVID-19 crisis, and responses from state education agencies remain varied (Education Commission of the States, 2020). This leaves educators and families without much guidance on how to adapt effective bilingual education to this new reality.

The very nature of distance-learning instruction for bilingual education and ESL presents its own challenges. Language is fundamentally interactive. Effective English language

instruction requires verbal learning, listening comprehension and engaging dialogue (Goldenberg, 2008).

Even if school districts leverage every resource at their disposal, this new reality of quarantine-induced distance learning has serious implications for educational equity for English learners.

## Policy Recommendations

- The U.S. Department of Education and Congress must ensure that federal guidelines and legislation include protections for existing funding and allot additional funding supports, materials, high-quality instruction and appropriate and timely assessments for English learners.
- Educational continuity plans - either online or through paper packets - should continue sound language acquisition practices, such as bilingual materials, explicit language and content objectives, comprehensible input, and differentiated assessments.
- Technology and other educational continuity expenditures resulting from federal waivers must include bilingual resources, materials and bilingual computer accessibility tools, e.g., first-language operating systems and menus. This should also include access to professionals who speak the home language represented at affected campuses. These translators will help schools and parents communicate about certain documents that schools must have, such as language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC) documents, admission, review and dismissal (ARD) recommendations and letters on graduation requirements.
- States should increase the funding for English learners as this educational disruption will have long-lasting effects.
- Dissemination of educational continuity resources must provide instructions in students' home languages. This includes bilingual procedures for checking out tablets and other equipment.
- In states where parents must sign off on curriculum changes, such as graduation plans, schools must make every effort to speak directly with parents in their home language by leveraging translators.
- State governments must develop clear, accessible and multimedia bilingual education and ESL guidelines that do not solely rely on internet access.
- School districts can provide ways for families to engage with the at-home instructional materials through suggested activities, interactive projects and instructional guides for families to work through academic content with students. Additional follow-up communication with families from teachers and educational staff via phone, mail and electronically helps to ensure that students' language and instructional needs continue to be met.

As normal school operations and our daily routines are thrown into disarray from COVID-19, either due to precautionary measures like social distancing or from health complications related to the virus, we cannot lose sight of the importance of English learners' education and ensuring high-quality education for all students.

[References available online.](#)

**For more information and policy news, see  
IDRA's Learning Goes On web hub.**

## VISIT LEARNING GOES ON WEB HUB

## Virtual VOE

## Free Webinars on Education for Immigrant Families

IDRA and the Consulate General of Mexico in San Antonio have been partnering to help Mexican and Mexican American families navigate the U.S. education system and learn about important educational opportunities in both countries.

But since the consulate is closed due to the COVID-19 crisis, IDRA's Ventanilla de Orientación Educativa (VOE) in San Antonio is launching a portal with bilingual materials and videos for families. Topics include:

- \* Rights of Immigrant Students (PreK-12)
- \* Navigating the U.S. K-12 Education System
- \* College Financial Aid Opportunities for Immigrant Students
- \* Adult & Community Education Opportunities in Spanish
- \* Educational Opportunities in Mexico for Nationals Living in Both Countries

**The first video "Rights of Immigrant Students" is now live at the Virtual VOE portal in English and Spanish.**



[Watch VOE Videos](#)

[Learn more about the IDRA VOE](#)

## Free Webinar Series

### Next Educator Webinar: PBL at Home & Across the Curriculum

Project-based learning (PBL) is a powerful approach for educators to use with distance learning because it creates quality home learning experiences. Through hands-on experiences, students can explore, create, engage and connect what they are learning to the real-world. Join us as we explain PBL components of this interdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning approach with an equity lens and discuss applications of PBL across the curriculum.


Join Dr. Stephanie Garcia, IDRA's STEM and gender equity education specialist, as she hosts a practical conversation with our guests:



- Ryan Beltrán, Founder, Elequa
- Dr. Carmen Fies, UTSA Associate Professor of STEM Education and Instructional Technologies
- David Padilla, Teacher, Dwight STEM Academy, South San Antonio ISD

**Tuesday, April 14, 2020 @  
2:00 pm (cst)**

**REGISTER NOW**




**Equitable Practices for Online Learning**  
*free webinar series*

**Tues, April 14, 2020 2:00 pm (cst)** **PBL at Home & Across the Curriculum**

See our library of webinars:

- **Equitable Practices for Teaching Online:** On-demand
- **Digital Divide: Connectivity, Infrastructure and Devices:** On-demand
- **Tools & Tips to Alleviate the Homework Gap:** On-demand
- **Facilitating Online Math Sessions:** April 7

<https://idra.news/WebinarSeries>



## At Home During COVID-19

### Making Math Connections

Math is all around us. Whether you are indoors or out for some fresh air, making math part of your daily routine helps students understand that math is important - and can even be fun. During this time of school closures, educators and parents are finding ways to teach, reteach and explore numeracy and math topics in the real world for students of all ages. Below are essential concepts, by grade level groups, and recommendations to support student learning in math at home .

### Essential Concepts by Grade

Math education is a like building a house. Elementary school math provides a strong foundation and blueprint for learning. Middle school math concepts represent the wiring, plumbing and framing of the structure. Algebra (1 and 2) and geometry finish the home.

Many times, students struggle in math because they have not mastered essential concepts from previous years. While all math skills and concepts learned are important, the section below focuses on a few key math concepts that students must review, practice and understand to successfully build on their math knowledge and increase their mental math speed.

#### Grades K-5: Laying the Foundation

- Number Sense and Basic Operations
- Multiplication Tables
- Fractions

## Grades 6-8: Essential Components

- Negative Numbers
- Order of Operations (a.k.a., "PEMDAS" or parentheses, exponents, multiplication/division, addition/subtraction)
- Solving multi-step algebraic equations
- Graphing lines

## Grades 9-12: Critical Thinking

This grade grouping has the most variation depending on students' skill level and school. Students should strive to complete Algebra 2 to increase access to and success in college. Some advanced students will complete statistics, college algebra, pre-calculus and/or multiple levels of calculus.

- Converting word problems into equations and solving
- Perimeter, area and volume of geometric shapes and solids
- Basic trigonometry

## Tips for Parents to Support Their Children's Learning in Math

### Early Childhood and Preschool

- Talk to your child about numbers. Teachers would like their students to be able to recognize the numbers 1 to 10 and count to 20 when they start school.
- Help your child learn the names of shapes, such as squares, circles and triangles. Point out toys and other items in your home that have these shapes.
- Teach your children how to say their telephone number and address, which are easier to learn if paired with the melody of a familiar song such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

### Elementary School

- Ask your children to explain what they are learning in math. Letting children take the teacher role gives them the chance to practice new skills and to clarify their thinking on a lesson.
- Talk to your child about how adults use math in their everyday lives, for example, grocery shopping, budgeting, balancing a checkbook, and checking clothing sizes.
- Teach your child math by teaching about money.

### Middle School

- Cook up some calculations. Get your children to measure ingredients while you cook and ask how they would convert a recipe for four into a dinner for two or a banquet for 20.
- Discuss unfamiliar words in your child's math homework. Do not be afraid to admit you do not know or remember some of the definitions. Look them up together in the [Illustrated Mathematics Dictionary](#) (which also has a Google Translate switch).

### High School

- No matter how old your children are, do not be embarrassed if you do not remember how to work the problems they bring home. There are several online resources that

can help you learn, review and brush up on your skills.

- You and your child can review lessons on almost any topic for free at [www.math.com](http://www.math.com) and [www.khanacademy.com](http://www.khanacademy.com). And for resources in Spanish, see [www.mathtv.com](http://www.mathtv.com) and [es.khanacademy.org](http://es.khanacademy.org).

The most important thing you can do is be positive about math! Children often believe that their success in math is based on their parents' success. Persistence is more important than heredity.

These ideas and many more are in the free eBook, **101 Simple Ways to Help Your Child With Math**, by Jefferson County Public Schools.

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## Equity Resources for Online Learning

**Children First**  
**IDRA**  
Transforming Education  
Issue Brief

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

In the wake of the COVID-19-propelled 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, misperceptions 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.

**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 2015 U.S. Census Bureau data, finding (2018):

- 15% 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
- 17% 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 completing schoolwork through the phone can be extremely difficult. While conference platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts and online video streaming are the most interactive components of online education, they can 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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9815 Colglahn Road, Suite 101 • San Antonio, Texas 78203 • (210) 444-9191 • (210) 444-9194 • [www.idra.org](http://www.idra.org) • [contact@idra.org](mailto:contact@idra.org)

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

PDF

**Children First**  
**IDRA**  
Transforming Education

**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 research-based strategies for K-12 educators.

**Set Up Educator Collaborations**

Issues with implementing online classes can be shared up by having teachers from groups and collaboratively develop the most effective ways to teach their students material online. Additionally, campus leaders and technology specialists should be on-call for teachers developing courses to help work through any technical issues and further 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 produce the best outcomes when educators encourage students to work together on understanding the content and resulting assignments (Hanover 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 limited 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 engaging 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 hands-on exercises with the text (Ivan, 2011; Johnson, 2012; O'Malley, 2017). Break content delivery into data-driven models that engage learners (Lin & Zheng, 2017).

**Use Multimedia for Young Learners**

Students who are not yet strong readers, or who may have difficulty navigating online, classrooms 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 10-minute chunks that allow students to work with the material they have learned in smaller, active segments. Suggestions for "chunking" lessons also include engaging students with graphic organizers, breaking up texts with photographs and examples, and incorporating color in any visual text sections (Oliver, et al., 2020; O'Malley, 2017). Courses that are visually appealing are more engaging for students (Hanover Research, 2020).

**Maintain Continued Teacher Presence**

It is highly important that educators are mentally present for their students – not by simply responding to questions students post online, but by actively communicating with students (O'Malley, 2017; Reavley & Beck, 2021). 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 (Ivan, 2011; Hanover 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 (Hanover Research, 2020). Successful educators analyze available data, use appropriate assessments for their students, and change instruction to suit unique needs (O'Malley, et al., 2020; Reavley & Beck, 2021).

**Build Authentic Family Engagement**

Online courses can make it difficult to gauge motivation 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**

Guardians and students should stay in touch, and the policies around responding to student or parent communications should be understood by all parties. For example, teachers can (Ivan, 2011; Hanover, 2015):

- Answer student emails within 24 hours;
- Include phone calls with each student at least once a month;
- Have equity 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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## News Dashboard

### IDRA's COVID-19 Education News Dashboard

IDRA released a dashboard with news and social media streams related to COVID-19 and education along with key resources.



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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.