

Best Practices for Teaching with Technology During Coronavirus Closures

We're living and working in unprecedented times, and it's hard to know what to do and what not to do regarding distance learning and posting on social media during the extended school closure. Here are some helpful tips as we work on formulating more specific guidance:

1. Know your employer's rules for online engagement and follow them at all times. Most boards of education have policies in place to define what is allowable on work computers and networks. In addition, boards of education may have policies that describe appropriate and inappropriate online interactions with students and families. Re-familiarize yourself with these policies and follow them at all times. If you are concerned that your employer does not have policies to provide you with sufficient guidance to work with technology under these evolving circumstances or if the current policies are inadequate to address the current directives to engage in distance learning, please inform your UniServ director.

2. Be aware of the professional online presence you project. Whichever online learning platform you are using, give yourself time to learn it, be present at all times when you're on it, and minimize distractions and personal interruptions. Being professional in an online learning platform means not eating, drinking, or multitasking; placing yourself in a neutral, professional space; dressing in professional clothing; minimizing all personal interruptions; and always speaking, typing, and posting with the same professionalism you have in all of your typical interactions with students, families, and other members of the school community.

3. Ensure student privacy. This includes making sure that you are engaged in online instruction in a private space and also making sure that no application you use is set to 'record' while you are using it (many applications such as Zoom

may automatically record your session unless you specifically tell it not to record). Do not send your students to websites or social media apps that are not approved by the board of education, as unapproved websites may gather personally identifiable information about students. Check with your employer if you have questions about maintaining student privacy or if they have a list of allowable apps and websites that meet FERPA guidelines. If you have additional concerns, contact your UniServ director.

4. Maintain your own online privacy in your interactions with students. Make all of your personal social media accounts private and establish professional accounts on all platforms and applications that you need for work. While ensuring that your students are not being recorded in online formats, seek the same for yourself. If your employer expects your online interactions to be recorded and your collective bargaining agreement does not address it, contact your UniServ director. Recognize that when using an employer-provided network or computer an employee does not have a right to privacy; however, if recorded, it may not be used to evaluate you as a teacher by your administrator. COMAR clearly requires that observations, announced or unannounced, "shall be conducted with full knowledge of the teacher." (13A.07.09.04)

5. When selecting materials to use in online instruction, adhere to all copyright laws. Members should consider copyright issues in online instruction just as they would in face-to-face instruction. While a 'fair use exception' allows copyrighted materials to be used without permission in many educational circumstances, this allowance is not absolute. If you have questions, please consult your UniServ director.

6. Commit to creating a positive community online. It is important for your students to feel connected to you and each other during this time. Stay positive about all your students and be patient with their progress. They're learning as they go, just as you are.

7. Communicate patience and encouragement. Be patient with parents who are dealing with stressors professionally and personally as well as with the added pressure of helping their students with online assignments.

8. As much as is reasonable, focus on instruction. Students may need reassurance from us now, and some acknowledgment of the changes that all of us are experiencing may be very valuable. However, too much conversation might upset students with anxiety disorders or students who are seeking stability during unstable times. Reach out to your administration and/or pupil services colleagues if you feel you could benefit from additional guidance on educating during a time of uncertainty.

9. Allow yourself some grace. Be patient with yourself. Everyone is feeling the stress of the uncertainty caused by coronavirus and doing the best we can under the circumstances. We know that this is a new paradigm of teaching and learning for educators, students, and parents. Try new things, reach out to colleagues to collaborate and learn from each other, and know that not reaching perfection is not failure. Provide yourself and your students grace as we navigate through these uncertain times.

Visit MSEA's website, marylandeducators.org for updates on best digital learning practices.

