



VIRTUAL TEACHING

AND

LEARNING STRATEGIES

FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Mississippi Department of Education

359 North West Street

P. O. Box 771

Jackson, Mississippi 39205-0771

(601) 359-2586

www.mdek12.org/EC

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to help teachers and parents navigate the world of online learning. In this time of uncertainty, we must remain flexible but continue to work toward the goal of educating our children with the same amount of diligence that we would in the classroom.

The Mississippi Department of Education Office of Early Childhood believes that teachers should not revise the philosophy of teaching because of virtual (online) learning, but adjust strategies being used to continue opportunities for students to discover, learn, and grow in all environments.

SETTING THE TONE *for Virtual (Online) Learning*



Greet the students

Just as greeting students is essential in the classroom, greeting students virtually is also very important. Students still need to see bright shining faces and hear warm smooth toned voices. This experience is not only new for you, but for them as well. The environment should continue to be comfortable for learning.

Set behavior expectations

Provide simple behavior expectations that will minimize distractions and help all students remain focused and attentive. Remind students to be respectful of others and to the electronic equipment. Individualize rules and expectations, as appropriate, to support children's needs. It may be necessary to review the usage of the technical platform with parents prior to meeting with students. This will allow students to be prepared when entering the virtual classroom.

Teach calming techniques

Because students are learning from a different platform, expect social and emotional issues to arise such as some students not wanting to talk, some students wanting to talk a lot, and some students being very excited about the things in their home environment. For assistance with calming techniques and other challenging behaviors visit this [website](#) for assistance.

Keep instruction simple

Sitting in front of a screen for extended periods of time can be difficult. Provide simple instruction to maximize time. Use positive reminders to inform children of what to do. Be very direct and predictable.

Have socialization at the end of the lesson

Students will be excited about seeing you and other children. Provide planned opportunities for socialization. Allow children the opportunity to have virtual recesses after instructional time is complete.

Teach as much as possible

Keep lessons short but impactful. Use your time wisely and provide as much academic time as students can handle. Be prepared by knowing your technology and predict any mishaps during your planning time. This will allow you to maximize the time you have with your students.

Give wiggle breaks

Plan "wiggle breaks" as a solution to sitting and looking at the screen for periods of time. This can be done through games, music or singing. Just make it fun!

SCHEDULING AND ORGANIZING INSTRUCTION



Use flexible grouping based on age and attention span

Schedule 30 – 45 minutes of group instruction day based on age and attention span (pre-k approximately 30 minutes; kindergarten – approximately 45 minutes).

Lessons should continue to be short and impactful. Find ways to maintain the validity of the curriculum while making full use of your time. Provide families with a virtual class schedule. Make that time a fun learning experience for all students.

Schedule certain times of day for small group or individual instruction

There are times you will be meeting with students in groups but also schedule one-on-one appointments to establish and maintain relationships with families and students. This will allow individualization and differentiation. This time can take place throughout the day after group lessons have been completed.

Limit small groups for instruction (1 – 6 per group)

Children learn best in small groups. Schedule children’s virtual time in small groups. This will minimize behavior issues and maximize learning opportunities.

Focus on learning and procedure – not technology

Even during virtual learning, the curriculum should be taught with fidelity. Lessons and activities should be developmentally appropriate and aligned to the Mississippi Early Learning Standards. The focus of lessons should not be technology. Technology is only the means of delivery and serves as the classroom and not the lesson or activity. Standards, objectives, and assessments should still be the driving force of instruction.

ENGAGING STUDENTS VIRTUALLY



Consider whether your lesson is better for a small or large group

Plan ahead and think through your online teaching process to reach all your students.

Consider your student's likes and dislikes

Try to plan online activities that will hold your students' attention. Try new ideas when others do not work. At times group your students according to things they like and dislike.

Decide if you want Gallery View to see all students or Speaker View to see only the student that is talking

Consider whether to repeat instructions

Repeating directions online is sometimes necessary due to technology. Keep in mind that to reinforce listening skills you want to minimize the number of times you repeat instructional directions.

Consider adjusting your speaking and listening for computer delays in student responses

Technology works differently on each device and broad band works differently in every area. Work with your students and families to find a happy medium for listening and give appropriate wait time for each student.

PROVIDE MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO RESPOND



Ask questions with short response answers

Maximize learning time by minimizing the open – ended questions during large group. Try asking open – ended questions during small group or during individual instruction. If possible, touch items on the screen so students will know what you are talking about.

Give students individual turns to respond

Unmute one student at a time to allow one child to answer, read, etc. With this method, you will not hear all the other children and they cannot hear their peer’s response dependent upon the lesson being taught.

Give delayed feedback

As a teacher you want to make sure your students know the answers and are not relying on you to tell them the answer. Pause your response for about three seconds then say the answer with the students to hear what your students are going to say.

Use Hand Signals – thumbs up/thumbs down/emojis

Using emojis, facial expressions, and active hands helps students stay active and engaged in the learning. Remember when asking students to make hand gestures, such as raising their thumbs up or down, that students may not hold their hand up high enough to be seen on camera. Don’t assume the student does not know the answer because their hands cannot be seen.

Use short written responses using a virtual white board or paper and pencil

Sample Response Virtual White Boards include:

1. Sleeve protector (white paper sheet insert), dry erase markers and damp rag or paper towel to wipe off
2. Paper plate
3. Paper
4. Hand – held mirror, dry erase markers and damp rag or paper towel to wipe off
5. Dish (plate or saucer), dry erase markers and damp rag or paper towel to wipe off
6. Response Sheet – one blank sheet of paper with labels for students to use based on questions asked by the teacher (A, B, C, D; True, False; Yes, No; Agree, Disagree)

	A	B	C	D
YES				T (true)
NO				F (false)

Thumbs up and thumbs down icons are located at the bottom center of the grid.



Encourage families to use teachable moments during daily activities

Take advantage of doing the laundry. Use this time to sort and match. Teach sequence while making the beds. Allow student to help with cooking. Follow recipes to support following directions.

Encourage families to talk to their children to build language

Talking to your child helps build vocabulary. Families also serve as models for their child in learning critical thinking skills and expressing themselves.

Encourage families to respond to their children with more than a one – word answer

Quality of feedback given to a child is important. Giving your child an extended response allows a child to gain a better understanding of a task and gives them specific information about what they are doing.

Ask families/students to find a place with limited distractions

Although the classroom is virtual, the setting of the classroom should be comfortable and suitable for learning. Children should be able to see clearly and hear through the device without distractions. If any materials have been shared for use, those materials should be ready and available within that space.

RESOURCES

Curriculum Associates (Producer), April 30, 2020, Effective Use of Phonics for Reading Webinar in a Time of Remote Learning, Dr. Anita Archer

Pianta, R.C., K.M. LaParo, B.K. Hamre. 2008. Classroom assessment scoring system. Charlottesville, VA: Teachstone Training, LLC.

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center](#)

[Nell K. Duke Distance Learning Webinars, University of Michigan](#)

[What Parents Can Learn From Child Care Centers That Stayed Open During Lockdowns](#)