Re: Digital Learning Planning: Information for Georgia Public School Districts

March 11, 2020

Greetings,

This document was prepared by the Georgia Department of Education(GaDOE) in collaboration with several Georgia school districts to assist local school administrators and staff in the development of digital learning plans.

Several districts that already have plans and procedures in place agreed to share general information and suggestions, which may be found in this document. We extend special thanks to those districts and digital learning leaders who have shared information about their planning processes. It should be noted this information is for guidance and is not to be considered a complete plan.The Georgia Department of Education does not endorse the use of any of these software tools and/or companies. Instead, tools are mentioned by local districts that may have found them tools to be of benefit.

 This document includes guiding questions and special considerations to help a local district develop a plan to ensure the continuity of education for their students.

Sincerely,

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Contents

Current Digital Learning Climate

Why is a task force critical to planning and implementation?

Having an identified team is necessary to ensure that the planning and organization of a digital learning plan has ownership. This is critical to ensure that **implementation steps are identified**, **metrics to ensure success are in place** and then **implementation steps are activated according to plan**. Planning requires that members of district and school administration, curriculum and learning specialists, service and support personnel, teachers and parents and students are members of the task force team. Teams should be aligned vertically so that the plan is contiguous and spans all grades.

What initiatives and programs are currently in place? Can you build on them?

Does your school or district currently plan for extended periods of time (blended learning days/inclement weather days) when students won't be physically at their schools? Consider modifying summer programs and learning camps to be mobile-friendly so students can explore learning opportunities on their or their parents' cell phone. This is a great opportunity to implement STEAM related activities. Ask civic and community agencies to provide learning opportunities for students and to share their efforts.

Has your district researched the benefits/effectiveness of virtual/non-traditional learning?

Learning is social and occurs effortlessly. Formal learning is the effort of trained educators to build on social learning constructs to ensure that certain information, in this case the Georgia Standards of Excellence, are mastered by students. To suggest that one learning environment such, as a traditional "classroom," is more effective than another such as a virtual learning environment is a misnomer. Research shows that students can learn and often excel in virtual learning environments because of their interest in technology. The key is ensuring students learn how to utilize these learning technologies and develop the discipline and organizational strategies that help them grow into independent, self-motivated learners. Students and teachers alike are often familiar with technology as home consumers. Thus, ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators will enhance and develop additional knowledge and skills necessary for supporting learning opportunities for their students. Given that students will matriculate into work or post-secondary institutions that rely heavily on the use of technology, they will always benefit from learning virtual education skills.

How will we know our plan/solution is effective?

Parent and teacher engagement is just as crucial as traditional summative and formative assessments. While seasoned leaders are often able to walk the halls of their school and "feel it in their gut" when it is operating efficiently, virtual learning requires more frequent surveys and polls to ascertain the health and climate of the school. Upon the initial implementation of a virtual learning environment, make it a point have frequent, brief "scrum meetings". Even a short, 15-minute meeting can help staff identify successes and failures and foster dialog for corrective adjustments. Feedback is critical for success.

Has leadership defined policy and procedures?

Scheduling and enduring communication about pacing is just as important in a virtual school as it is in a traditional school, and, leadership must provide the same guidance and context. Should students check in with their teachers at regular intervals? Will this happen through email or in an online chat, or will teachers have a virtual classroom that allows students to video-chat with their teachers? What counts for attendance for students and staff? Will teachers be expected to visit the physical school and their classrooms for regular planning or training?

During times of extended virtual learning days, expect a non-traditional school day that begins and ends at irregular times. Some parents may need to help their students but their work schedules may limit their

availability to the evenings. Teachers might find greater success in reaching parents and students after 7:00 in the evening. Plan for flexibility, equity, and equality for all students. Plan for virtual learning environments that are unique and much different from a traditional classroom. There is no need for a teacher to differentiate between a 1st block 9th Biology class and a 3rd block 9th Biology class – these students can be arranged in the same virtual class so the teacher can provide learning strategies to address these students equally. However, while a teacher may provide instruction for a larger segment of students, her need for additional support staff, such as Special Education, ESOL, and Gifted support specialists should be increased so that student equity and special needs are met.

Has Professional Development been provided to modify executive function for stakeholders?

The most critical part of a plan to ensure success is ongoing professional learning opportunities for all staff. Once leadership has clearly identified the role of each staff member, they should provide professional development for the staff to ensure that all are trained and fully understand their job and responsibilities. Staff members' day-to-day roles may differ greatly in a virtual environment as compared to a normal day at a school building. For instance, a district may need bus drivers to delivery meals prepared by the nutrition staff instead of transporting students to school. Drivers may also transport the school nurse, carry a mobile hotspot provided by technology services, and serve as a bookmobile by delivering books that been selected by the school's media specialist. Training on new procedures and cross-training are effective strategies to ensure a clear and consistent learning environment for all students.

Helping teachers understand how they can leverage learning technologies to deliver effective instruction is the single most important aspect of any digital learning plan. We recommend Georgia Virtual Learning's "Just-in-Time for Teachers: Digital Learning Days" micro-course and the "Effective Online Teaching" course for ALL teachers.

Are students/parents skilled in the use of technology to promote learning?

Students often love technology and consider it a necessary part of their daily lives, yet they are still "home consumers" and may require additional training that identifies way for them to effectively use learning technologies. A good first step is to train them on the proper use and how to be good digital citizens. Likewise, many parents may need training to help them understand their student's use of technology. Some parents may even be afraid of their children using technology and wonder whether or not it is safe. Consider providing ongoing training for students *and* parents related to the use of technology.

What is the role of administration, support staff, teacher, classified staff and the parent?

As staff members from a physical school are adapted to a virtual learning environment, they will need a clear understanding of their various responsibilities, especially if they are required to take new responsibilities. The administration and Human Resources must identify each role and set clear expectations and responsibilities for the duration of virtual learning days. Keep in mind that every staff member will perform a vital role.

What is the role of community stakeholders (Public library, civic organizations, faith-based organizations, etc.)?

Virtual learning can offer new and exciting learning strategies that don't work well in a traditional classroom. Students and teachers, no longer constrained by segmented blocks of time, can dive deep into exercises and projects, enabling true mastery learning. Leveraging community stakeholders to help provide many benefits will strengthen community ties with the school and ensure stronger partnerships. Certain community norms, such as attending worship services, will continue in some fashion, so asking worship leaders to reinforce school communications is a great way to ensure continuity. If students are able to use the religious center's Internet

service (should students not have Internet access at home) they may be able to download an upcoming lessons or to turn in their classwork into a teacher's Dropbox.

Has your communications team ascertained best practices to reach parents/guardians/community about continuity of learning strategies the school will use to continue instruction? Have you branded your solution?

Above all, ensuring timely and accurate information to parents, students, and the community is of paramount importance. Ensuring that a district and its schools has a communications team to communicate school information should be one of the first orders of business for planning for virtual learning days. This team should identify the school's brand (for instance, the name of the school's elearning plan), establish common verbiage and develop awareness with all staff. Having common verbiage and a brand helps decrease students' and parents' confusion about expectations.

Status of Infrastructure to Support Nontraditional Learning

What learning technologies are available for students and staff?

Your district's solution to non-traditional learning will largely be dependent upon solutions to which students have public access and your district's ability to supply access. The amount of out-bound bandwidth you have available is important if your digital solutions are still considered to be "in-house" and publicly available from servers located from within your school system. A good rule of thumb is 0.7 – 1.5 MB per user; possibly more for applications that are multimedia rich. For applications that are served from a cloud provider, ensure the provider can accommodate an increased load of users accessing resources at the same time.

Determining the amount of bandwidth that students have available from their home environment is difficult to determine. Students may only have access to the Internet through a mobile device, such as a cell phone, and instructional resources may need to be responsive and low-bandwidth.

Do support staff have clear, specific roles that identify their role in non-traditional learning plans?

In virtual learning environments, teacher's traditional teaching schedule will change. For instance, instead of a teacher having two "9th grade Biology" classes, he or she will combine these into one teaching session. There will be an increased need for instructional support personnel for teachers to be successful. Technology specialists may need to maintain a helpdesk to assist students who are having difficulty accessing the school's resources remotely. Every staff member will have a role that may or may not be functionally the same as under normal school days.

Is there an inventory of resources that are offering support for or free to use during extended digital learning days from COVID-19?

The Georgia Department of Education does not endorse the use of any software tools and/or companies mentioned in this document. Instead tools mentioned in this document are mentioned by local districts that may have found these tools to be of benefit to their respective districts.

Kahoot! - https://kahoot.com/blog/2020/02/27/kahoot-free-access-schools-higher-education-coronavirus/ Brainpop - https://educators.brainpop.com/2020/02/19/free-brainpop-access-	Discovery Education - https://www.discoveryeducation.com/coronavirus-response/ Zoom - https://blog.zoom.us/wordpress/2020/02/26/zoom-commitment-	Infinite Campus - https://view.s6.exacttarget.com/?qs=f02181cb22018e449585ae5113f68f8c0797980255e26584717da48407827512cb203ff48754fca8d450217106311973c1d32dad2ad7049

for-schools-affected-by-the-corona-virus/ Canva-https://www.canva.com/education/ Pear Deck - https://www.peardeck.com/stay-connected Nearpod- https://nearpod.com Flipgrid - https://info.flipgrid.com/	user-support-business-continuity-during-coronavirus-outbreak/ Quizlet- https://quizlet.com/teachers Quizizz - https://quizizz.com/ Animoto - https://animoto.com/ Jigsaw - https://jigsawinteractive.com/ Any school interested in Jigsaw can connect with us directly at customerassist@jigsawinteractive.com or call 877-571-0004 ext. 2285 to be directed to someone who can discuss what their needs are.	9e794deae6175837f14441860590e65ed02ba7ab65b42c7d5 Microsoft - https://educationblog.microsoft.com/en-us/2020/03/how-schools-can-ramp-up-remote-learning-programs-quickly-with-microsoft-teams/ Google - https://blog.google/inside-google/company-announcements/coronavirus-covid19-response/ PowerSchool/Schoology - https://www.powerschool.com/

Is there an inventory of OER (GaVS, TRL, Galileo, Get Georgia Reading, etc.) resources that support virtual instruction?

1. Open Educational Resources curated for teachers and students:

   GeorgiaStandards.org (Teacher Resource Link and Essentials Toolkit)
   Georgia Virtual Learning Shared Resources
   Georgia Public Broadcasting
   https://gpb.pbslearningmedia.org/
   https://www.gpb.org/education
   Get Georgia Reading resources
   Galileo library
   LibGuides: https://libguides.galileo.usg.edu/c.php?g=1008358
   - https://about.galileo.usg.edu/docs/website_docs/GALILEO_at_Home_High_School.pdf
   - https://about.galileo.usg.edu/docs/website_docs/GALILEO_at_Home_Kids.pdf

2. Professional Learning Resources

   - GaVL: Just in Time for Teachers – Digital Learning Days (1 hour micro-course) - http://bit.ly/GaDOE-GAVL-Digital-Learning-Course

   - GaVL: Effective Online Teaching Course - http://bit.ly/Georgia-Virtual-Learning-For-Educators

   - KSU's iTeach **to coach educators** about how to teach with online resources: Continuity Resources and Support from iTeach: bit.ly/iTeachContinuity

References

Aleigha Henderson-Rosser, **Atlanta Public Schools**

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