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TIPs for Supporting the Engagement of Students with Disabilities through Varied Service Delivery Models

As local school systems and public agencies (LSSs/PAs) begin to implement their recovery plans, the need to engage students is more crucial than ever. Maintaining student engagement, especially for students with disabilities, is a top priority for LSSs/PAs as they begin the 2020-2021 school year. Some strategies that were effective for connecting with students, building motivation, and supporting resiliency in the physical classroom translate to the remote learning setting. A virtual learning environment will require the use of new and innovative solutions and techniques to promote active engagement.

Utilizing technology to its fullest during this time can help students feel connected to their school, teacher(s), and peers as they continue to navigate the challenges of remote learning. To help support LSSs/PAs in their efforts to engage their students, especially students with disabilities, this supplement has been designed to provide tips from national experts for promoting student engagement through alternative service delivery models.

Kerry Rice and Kristen Kipp, authors of the article *How Can Educators Tap into Research to Increase Engagement During Remote Learning?* capture three primary components of learner engagement for in-person and online settings behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. As with all aspects of working with students with disabilities, these three components should be viewed through the lens of a student's typical baseline of healthy functioning and may vary from student to student. Rice and Kipp capture the types of engagement with common measurements for virtual setting in the chart below, knowing that there is not a single solution for increasing student engagement and motivation.¹

¹ Rice, K., & Kipp, K. (2020). *How Can Educators Tap into Research to Increase Engagement During Remote Learning?* <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-05-06-how-can-educators-tap-into-research-to-increase-engagement-during-remote-learning>

Type of Engagement	Definition	Common Measures that Teachers can use in a Virtual Environment
<i>Behavioral</i>	<i>How often and for how long learners engage with materials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of time a student spends on virtual learning opportunities. • Number of logins to a class LMS. • Consistency with interactions with lesson materials. • Assignments completed. • Levels of participation in online discussion forums/opportunities (e.g., Flipgrid). (Ensure that students with disabilities have an accessible way to engage (e.g., using speech-to-text software if they cannot type independently).
<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>How learners think about and make connections to what they are learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance on assessments. • Interactions within online discussion forums/opportunities (e.g., Flipgrid). • Quality of interactions within synchronous sessions, including verbal contributions, chats, and responses on interactive tools (e.g., PearDeck, Mentimeter). Ensure accessibility and support options for students with disabilities. • Word usage within online discussion forums/opportunities (e.g., Flipgrid). Adapt questions/prompts and supports in accordance with students IEPs.
<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Level of connectiveness and caring that learners feel in their class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tone and content of students' communication with the teacher and their peers. • The nature (or content) and quantity of parental involvement. • Emotional reaction to school and whether student feels valued.

Rice and Kipp state that:

"in its simplest form, engagement is a measure of how much we are attending to a purpose, task, or activity. When it comes to learning, engagement is influenced by a learner's level of motivation, focus, and cognitive ability as well as online course design and a teacher's decisions regarding facilitation style... Promoting and sustaining engagement of students with disabilities may require additional strategies and supports than those implemented for students at large [without disabilities]. The ways that students demonstrate engagement (or lack thereof) may be impacted by their disabilities. Attention, executive functioning, language ability (expressive and

receptive), reading/writing skills, self-regulation, and sensory perception may affect how a student responds to different modalities of remote instruction.

General and special educators, other service providers, and families should collaborate to discuss how each student's disability impacts their ability to engage with online learning. Individualized supports and strategies to assess engagement and progress should be determined for each student."

The tips and strategies below have been categorized by specific engagement principles that have been defined and explored to help support teachers and families as you begin recovery efforts.

Engagement Principle	Tips and Strategies for Support
<p>Increase Learner Engagement in a Remote Classroom</p> <p>One of the most consistent findings in engagement research is that a teacher has an enormous impact on the student's experience, influencing everything from students' perceived learning and self-efficacy to their motivation. Being an engaged teacher online means being visible in the class, whether that is through discussion posts, announcements, or assignment feedback.¹</p> <p>Engagement of students with disabilities in remote learning environments can be addressed proactively by the team's planning to implement the IEP in the remote learning environment. Planning ahead and consistently implementing the student's IEP lays the foundation for immediate engagement by</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Know the student: Think about aspects related to the student's unique disability circumstances, the relationship between these unique factors, and the instructional model. Identify compatible strategies necessary to adapt instruction to meet the needs of the student through accommodations, supplementary aids, and services and address IEP goals and objectives. For example, plan for pre-loading concepts using explicit instruction if you know the student requires this as part of his or her SDI and build time for this in advance of lessons. This allows the student to have a command of foundational knowledge, experience early success, and therefore remain engaged in the remainder of the remote lesson. Incorporate supports for attention and executive functioning, such as headings that break content in manageable chunks, diagrams and visuals, and breaks, into both synchronous lessons and asynchronous activities, based on student needs. It may be beneficial to collaborate with the student's previous teacher(s) and/or service provider(s) to understand how the student most successfully accessed and engaged with content during spring continuity of learning. ● Engage in long-term planning to support learning objectives: Plan for the long-term integration of IEP goals and objectives not addressed in the grade-level curriculum so that the student continuously engages with these skills and has repeated opportunities to practice and receive feedback. ● Communicate early and often using varied tools: A funny video or meme along with a hello and a weekly reminder of due dates can go a long way in reconnecting learners. Customizing these communications in alignment with student's IEP supports such as visual schedules and frequent reminders, will meet the needs of students with disabilities while serving as additional support to all students during remote learning. Providing timely feedback is a common support on IEPs, and this support in the remote classroom not only addresses an IEP need but builds a positive connection between teacher and student. Consult with the student and family to determine what communication approach(es) and tools would be

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<p>automatically reducing barriers that the student may face in the remote classroom.</p>	<p>the most effective. This may include text messages, instant messages, video calls, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use feedback to build relationships: Provide personalized feedback to let students know their work has been reviewed can strengthen relations. Video recorded feedback is not only an effective way to build a connection with learners; it may provide students with disabilities the opportunity to replay feedback when working asynchronously on independent tasks. If written feedback is used, be sure the student is able to read it independently and/or knows how to use tools (such as text-to-speech software) to read it. Ensure that feedback, as well as all instructional materials, are accessible (captioned, interpreted, intraoperative with a student's assistive technology, etc.). ● Trauma-Informed Approaches: Always a key component to providing services for students who have experienced trauma, trauma-informed approaches should be a framework for all interactions, as students may have experienced sickness or death within their social networks, had familiar social and community relationships, activities, and locations become inaccessible, or experienced overwhelming or confusing exposure to fear and anxiety from family, social connections, and/or media. ● Additional Individual Needs: Consider how other factors, such as English Learner status or homelessness, interact with disability-related needs. Coordinate supports from various professionals (special educators, EL specialists, social workers, behavior specialists, school counselors, etc.) to maximize benefits without duplicating efforts. Consider how supports that are effective in the school building to promote student and family connection and engagement can be translated to the virtual environment, such as instructional and behavioral supports. Consider how the student's participating in virtual instruction during the fall and/or the extended closing of face to face school sessions may have impacted or changed the student's needs for additional accommodations (such as the need for additional instructional accommodations like speech to text in the virtual environment, or the need for new positive behavior supports to address new or changed disruptive behavior). Promote opportunities for collaborative planning. ● Maintain Connection while Social Distancing: Teacher parades and chalk messages on students' sidewalks are a great example of recent efforts teachers have taken to demonstrate their level of commitment to maintain high levels of engagement with their students. Similar online approaches such as recorded or live book readings and virtual office hours can be just as effective.¹

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<p>Increase Family Engagement in a Remote Classroom</p> <p>Research has shown that the involvement of a responsible adult, typically a parent, is critical to the success of online learners. K-12 learners need the support of a caring adult to build executive functioning, manage their workload, and maintain motivation.¹ Schools can support families to support their children's participation in ways that are aligned with both the child's individual needs and the families' preferences, skills, and competing demands. Schools should be wary of assigning sole responsibility to parents/families for implementing supports specified in the child's IEP. All communication with families should be accessible to parents/family members with disabilities (e.g., captioned, available in alternative formats, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide a schedule: Teachers can support families to create and use a schedule that shows the days and times of synchronous classes and includes what activities students should be working on each day to help keep students on task. Parents may use technology tools already in the home such as smartphones or devices like the Amazon Echo to pre-load schedules and routines so that automated reminders are shared with students (i.e., time to log into a live class, time to submit your discussion board post). This allows peace of mind that prompts are in place throughout their child(ren)'s day. If families have limited internet access/technology, or if a student is better able to follow a printed schedule and the family does not have access to a printer, send home blank paper copies or laminated blank schedules with dry erase pens and inform family members supporting the student of how to create a daily schedule that can be followed. Consider how visual and auditory timers, visual transition cues, and other supports can be provided to families who may be unable to secure these items on their own (donation drives, pick up of borrowed materials at school, etc.).¹ Schools can support families to support their children's participation in ways that are aligned with both the child's individual needs and the families' preferences, skills, and competing demands. Schools should be wary of assigning sole responsibility to parents/families for implementing supports specified in the child's IEP. All communication with families should be accessible to parents/family members with disabilities (e.g., captioned, available in alternative formats, etc.). ● Offer tech support: Teachers can create short videos to help parents understand how to access their online content.¹ ● Provide concise, focused communication: Less is more. Parents can quickly become inundated with well-intentioned emails from various teachers. Keeping emails short and focused is best.¹ ● Survey parents: Periodic, brief surveys can help teachers understand what support parents need.¹ ● Family Support and Training; Offer flexible and individualized support (written tip sheets, modeling videos, and individual consultation via phone or web conferencing) to assist families in supporting their students in engaging in virtual learning and asynchronous activities. Be respectful of and responsive to family's needs and concerns, recognize competing demands of work, caregiving, etc. that may impact the family's engagement with virtual learning, especially during the traditional school day. Provide flexibility in scheduling the student's day. Explore opportunities for families to interact virtually for mutual support and socialization. Establish a virtual family support group for specialized needs such as ASL classes for parents/caregivers, supporting children with executive

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	<p>functioning, coaching on instructional strategies, etc. Incorporate synchronous meeting times with asynchronous resources such as resource email blasts or pre-recorded webisodes. When developing supports for families (webinars, resource materials, etc.), use family-friendly language to ensure that anyone trying to provide consistency in implementation and support, so the student understands the expectations and methods required. Partner with your local school system's family support office to promote engagement and build lasting relationships.</p>
<p>Facilitate Connections Between Students in a Remote Classroom</p> <p>Research shows that students who feel connected to other learners are more engaged. In connecting with other learners, students feel that they are part of a classroom community. When motivation for the content itself is lacking, the desire to socialize with other learners can keep a student coming back to the work of a remote classroom.¹</p> <p>It is critical to preserve peer to peer connections in the remote classroom so that students with disabilities can continue to have access to and engage with their non-disabled peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intentionally build opportunities for peer interaction: Students with disabilities can continue to realize the benefit of social interactions with peers during facilitated, informal settings that would mimic that of the school day. The remote classroom is not a reason to isolate students with disabilities from their non-disabled peers. For example, if clubs that normally met during an activity period are meeting after school, work collaboratively with club sponsors to support the engagement of students with disabilities in these social opportunities. ● Leverage the remote environment to bring together different student groups: Group students for synchronous virtual instruction and social interaction opportunities who do not normally attend the same physical school but would benefit from such opportunities (e.g., a teacher of the Deaf could conduct a small virtual group with two hard-of-hearing students of the same grade and instructional level who don't go to the same school; a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) might conduct a virtual "lunch bunch" or other sessions to address self-advocacy or social skills with students from several schools. ● Use prompts to spark discussion: Discussion boards can be a great space for conversations, especially when teachers use prompts that are open-ended, stir debate, or force deeper learning. Prompts can also be used to generate video discussions using a social learning tool like Flipgrid or an online debate tool such as Tricider.¹ A speech pathologist and general education teacher may wish to collaborate on "conversation-starters" to address the language needs of students with disabilities in an authentic way. ● Student talk during synchronous learning: Lectures and focused learning can happen through recorded videos, but synchronous sessions offer an opportunity to share and talk to each other as a community. Sessions hosted through Zoom or Google Meet can incorporate traditional classroom activities like jigsaws, small group activities in breakout rooms, or discussion protocols.¹ Ensure that students with disabilities have appropriate and accessible options to participate in group discussions and activities using assistive

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	<p>technology or other supports as needed. Create a classroom culture that respects and values each person's contributions, accepts various ways of communicating, and provides adequate wait time for everyone to participate. Establish class expectations (such as "class rules for virtual instruction") that are developmentally appropriate in order to ensure that participation is equitable and respectful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group assignments: Learners can create collaborative group projects through a shared Google doc or Google site. For instance, students can collaborate on the creation of an Editor's Toolbox website with grammar tips by assigning groups of students to each page within site.¹ Ensure that students with disabilities have the support they need (assistive technology, adapted materials, adult assistance, etc.) to actively contribute to group work. Include other staff members who support/work with the student (paraeducators, related service providers, co-teaching models) may be utilized to support the student in accessing and participating in virtual group assignments. ● Student-led tech support: Students who are exceptionally gifted in technology might troubleshoot, or a teacher can create a "Tech Help" forum that students can moderate. Teachers should take care to set up structured guidelines for classroom use. Include students with disabilities who are technology savvy as help-givers in these structures.¹
<p>Accessibility Systems using virtual/distance learning for all or part of their instruction must ensure accessibility of learning management systems, instructional tools, and curriculum materials. Students will not be able to actively engage in learning unless they have access to content in a useable format at the same time as non-disabled peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Revise or Replace Documents: Some tools and solutions used in the initial continuity of learning may need to be revised or replaced if they do not meet accessibility requirements. ● Provide Technology and Devices: Students may need additional technology tools and devices, and students, families, and staff (teachers, paraeducators, and interpreters) may require additional training and ongoing technical support. Develop tip sheets, videos, helplines, webinars, and other resources that can be accessed by students, families, other caregivers, etc. for technical support. ● Develop Protocols for the Selection and Creation of Documents: Systems need to develop protocols for the selection and creation of accessible digital content and train teachers accordingly. The AEM Center provides tips and resources for teachers and school leaders for remote learning.

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<p>Service Delivery For some students with and without disabilities, engagement in the remote classroom can present challenges based on disability factors or other external factors such as lack of access to the internet, technology, or family schedules.</p> <p>For these students, think about how engagement can be increased through allowable and safe alternative service delivery models. Increased engagement may be realized by simply adjusting the virtual service delivery model, or may require adjustments that include elements of face-to-face instruction if it is safe to do so.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual Service Delivery Options: Consider ways to adjust the virtual service delivery model based on the student's IEP as well as family input, performance in the spring distance learning model, and other information. A once "non-responsive" student may realize remote-learning benefits when the service delivery model is tailored to meet his or her individual needs. Consider: 1) co-teaching/push-in during synchronous general education instruction, 2) individual and/or small group synchronous instruction, 3) adaptations to asynchronous assignments to promote access and progress and to address IEP goals, 4) paraeducator or teacher support, 5) related services via teletherapy, 6) facilitated social interaction, and other individualized options, 7) enhanced opportunities, both instructionally and socially, to virtually engage with peers. Consider what combination of live, recorded, and other instructional methods may meet a student's needs. • Other Service Delivery Options: As appropriate for individual students, consider alternatives to supplement or replace computer-based virtual instruction, including physical materials and learning tools, paper-based instructional packets, manipulatives, resources available in the student's environment, etc. Additional supports may include supplemental phone calls, video meetings, etc. to follow up on content taught. Consider partnering with outside service providers to deliver services. • Face-to-Face Options: Explore opportunities to bring targeted groups of students into schools to receive some/all special education and related services. These options may include full instructional days, small group or individual sessions to provide instruction and intervention, facilitated participation in virtual instruction in school buildings, or other options. Provide guidance to IEP teams, based on local system parameters, for decision making for in-person services. Provide supportive tutoring options. Remember to keep in mind safety and health guidance. • In-Home Service: If health and safety guidelines and local parameters permit, consider whether some services may be provided in the student's home. If considering in-home services, provide guidance and protocol for staff and student safety. Refer to local protocols already in place to provide guidance and a foundation (e.g., Infants and Toddlers, PPW, Home, and Hospital Instruction, local health department). • Utilize of Paraeducators: Develop creative ways to utilize paraeducators to support engagement and progress. These may include, but are not limited to 1) have paraeducators join synchronous sessions to collect data on student performance, monitor behavior and provide reinforcement, 2) deliver interventions

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	<p>under the guidance and supervision of certified teachers, and 3) deliver supplementary aids, services, and supports through individual or small group sessions with students while they are working on their independent assignments 4) train the paraeducator to become an effective mentor for the student to encourage attendance and engagement, 5) have the paraeducator facilitate getting the day started, structuring the day, providing a daily check-in with the student/family. Paraeducators may also be used to provide clerical support, record keeping, scheduling, and other tasks in order to allow teachers to focus on instruction. Ensure that paraeducators have received training in utilizing technology that students will also be using, including assistive technology and other tech tools, as well as have regular collaboration and communication with the teacher to discuss appropriate strategies for supporting students within the digital learning environment.</p>

Resources

- <https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/continuity-learning-tips-educators> - strategies from the National Center for Intensive Intervention on delivering their sample lessons in a virtual setting. Includes video examples and tip sheets for educators and families.
- <https://ncsi-library.wested.org/resources/659> - *Family Guide to At-Home Learning* produced by the CEEDAR center provides brief tips and additional resources to help families use high-leverage practices to promote their child's engagement and success with distance learning.
- <https://www.pbis.org/resource/creating-a-pbis-behavior-teaching-matrix-for-remote-instruction> The Center on PBIS offers a practice guide for establishing universal/tier 1 behavior supports in the virtual learning context. These supports can then be adapted and intensified to meet individual needs of students with disabilities.

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