



Addressing Risks Associated with Remote Instruction

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BACKGROUND

Remote instruction and learning in K-12 settings have shifted many premises based exposures to virtual based exposures. Protocols are needed to ensure continued student safety within remote learning environments while providing information and resources to support educators and other school personnel in following mandatory reporting requirements. Remote learning also introduces cyber threats never before contemplated.

When school buildings are open, districts have plans in place to assess and ensure student safety needs are met. Educators and school staff are trained annually in the warning signs of child abuse and their role as mandated reporters. Schools have student support systems, including school social workers and counselors, that can help link families to services. When safety concerns for a student are identified, school social workers, counselors and members of the Behavioral Threat or Ideation Assessment Team provide guidance and support to educators in filing reports with child protective services or other appropriate authorities as well as crisis response services when students are exposed to potential traumatic events occurring during distance learning.

However, during times of remote instruction, risk factors for child abuse, neglect and distress may increase due to:

- social isolation
- family stress
- parenting stress
- financial uncertainty and insecurity
- the absence of child care or after school programs

Physical distancing to slow the spread of coronavirus intensifies these risk factors as seen in the decrease of calls to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline System. In remote learning environments, it can be more difficult to assess student safety and to detect signs of child abuse and neglect. There may also be less structured support and guidance for making reports. Nevertheless, all educators and school personnel remain mandated reporters. Additionally, remote learning environments may create one on one student/teacher situations that require applications similar to on campus setting measures that protect students, staff and educators.

APPLYING SAFETY TO REMOTE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

During school-building closures, districts and schools need to modify and adapt processes and protocols to ensure students are engaged in learning and students' safety needs are met. Below are questions school personnel should consider in adapting safety plans to identify students that may be at risk of neglect and abuse.

- What is the policy and procedure for tracking student engagement during remote learning?
- What are the expectations for student engagement?
- How frequently do educators and staff need to have contact with students?
- What protocols does a teacher follow if he or she is not able to locate a student or if a student is not meeting the expectation for engagement?
- What process is used to contact the student and family if the teacher cannot reach a student?
- How are adapted processes and protocols communicated to staff during remote learning?
- How are staff trained and prepared to identify and report signs of abuse, neglect and distress during a time of remote learning?
- What resources do educators and school staff have to help them identify abuse and neglect?
- How are educators and staff supported if they have questions about a student's safety and don't know if they should call children protective services? Is a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team a
- How are schools and districts using their district or countywide crisis teams to identify, prevent and intervene if a child or family needs support?

Strategies to ensure that all students are engaged and in a safe environment

- Ensuring student resident addresses are up to date and parent or guardian contact information is readily available in case of student distress or when emergency response is needed. This is especially important during virtual PE courses. Teachers should have this information readily available. Conversely, teacher contact information should be up to date and available to administrative staff in case of emergencies.
- Providing a family support hotline (published on the district website) and shared through communication materials sent to student families.
- Weekly communication and family engagement provided by teachers.
- Every family should participate in a virtual student/parent conference. During a virtual student/parent conference, teachers should ask about the family's needs and any struggles the family has. Teachers should be aware of family support programs or where to direct families for additional information.
- Teachers must communicate with the school counselor, administrator or designated staff if he or she has not had any contact with a family after repeated attempts, who will then attempt to connect with the family.
- If there are suspicions of abuse or neglect, a referral should be made by the district to the local children protective services or local police for a wellness check.
- No teacher or staff should engage in one-on-one interactions with students. One approach to overcoming one-on-one situations when parent or guardian participation is not possible, is utilizing an instructional aid or other staff to observe individualized meetings.
- Avoiding unsupervised Zoom or similar online platform breakout classroom sessions. Have at least one adult present during such breakout sessions.
- All employees must continue to adhere to the district's Use of Technology Policy and Code of Conduct Policy.
- All employees must continue to adhere to the district's Student-Staff Interaction policies.

OTHER RELEVANT ASPECTS OF REMOTE LEARNING

Appropriate supports for students with IEP and 504 Plans

Ensure students with disabilities will be included in all offerings of school education models by using the IEP process to customize educational opportunities and supports when necessary.

Targeted student support and intervention/Trauma-informed supports and crisis response

Develop plans and support for small groups of students who need additional instructional and/or social and emotional attention. Students exposed to traumatic events during distance learning i.e. witnessing of violent or aggressive acts, injuries/illness need crisis consultations, debriefs and linkages to school and community resources to prevent symptoms of anxiety or other adverse reactions

Communication and feedback

Regularly communicate with students and parents on learning goals and student progress, including weekly teacher-student-parent/guardian communication and reporting of student progress consistent with district grading policies to maintain the home-to-school connection.

Support for English learners

Continue to provide designated and integrated instruction in English language development including assessments of progress toward language proficiency and targeted support to access curriculum.

Consistent direct live instruction for every student

Provide access to daily direct live instruction for students, with the option of participating in recorded instruction at alternate times of the day.

Access and availability

Teachers should be available to students outside of direct live instruction. Access to recordings of direct live instruction and distance learning pursuant to Education Code section 43500 (as it modifies interpretations of Education Code section 51512) should be readily available. Recordings may be used for evidentiary purposes for allegations of child abuse or neglect, FAPE violations, teacher accountability, etc.

Collaboration

Meaningful and structured collaboration between teachers, principals, and colleagues from grade levels and departments should continue in order to improve outcomes for students based on data and student need.

Professional development and support for educators

District's should continue to provide professional development for all educators on strategies needed to deliver high-quality instruction and on the district's learning management system, Google Classroom, etc. to ensures students' access to learning grounded in the essential standards.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

Remote and hybrid instruction are largely reliant on Google Classroom, Zoom and other technology platforms. While advantageous and instrumental, these platforms do introduce cyber threats such as bombing and Hijacking that at minimum disrupt teaching and class order. Below are suggestions that will minimize cyber threats, even in non-instructional settings:

1. PASSWORD PROTECTION

The simplest way to prevent unwanted attendees and hijacking is to set a password for your meeting. Passwords can be set at the individual meeting, user, group, or account level for all sessions. In order to do so, first sign in with your account at the Zoom web portal. If you want to set up a password at the individual meeting level, head straight over to the "Settings" tab and enable "Require a password when scheduling new meetings", which will ensure a password will be generated when a meeting is scheduled. All participants require the password to join the meeting. Subscription holders can also choose to go into "Group Management" to require that everyone follows the same password practices.

2. AUTHENTICATE USERS

When creating a new event, you should choose to only allow signed-in users to participate.

3. JOIN BEFORE HOST

Do not allow others to join a meeting before you, as the host, have arrived. You can enforce this setting for a group under "Account Settings."

4. LOCK DOWN YOUR MEETING

Once a session has begun, head over to the "Manage Participants" tab, click "More," and choose to "lock" your meeting as soon as every expected participant has arrived. This will prevent others from joining even if meeting IDs or access details have been leaked.

5. TURN OFF PARTICIPANT SCREEN SHARING

No-one wants to see pornographic material shared by a Zoom bomber, and so disabling the ability for meeting attendees to share their screens is worthwhile. This option can be accessed from the new "Security" tab in active sessions.

6. USE A RANDOMLY-GENERATED ID

You should not use your personal meeting ID if possible, as this could pave the way for pranksters or attackers that know it to disrupt online sessions. Instead, choose a randomly generated ID for meetings when creating a new event. In addition, you should not share your personal ID publicly.

7. AVOID FILE SHARING

Be careful with the file-sharing feature of meetings, especially if users that you don't recognize are sending content across, as it may be malicious. Instead, share material using a trusted service such as Box or Google Drive. At the time of writing, Zoom has disabled this feature anyway due to a "potential security vulnerability."

8. REMOVE NUISANCE ATTENDEES

If you find that someone is disrupting a meeting, you can kick them out under the "Participants" tab. Hover over the name, click "More," and remove them. You can also make sure they cannot rejoin by disabling "Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin" under the "Settings: Meetings - Basic" tab.

CALIFORNIA CODE

ED CODE 51512 (ENACTED BY STATS. 1976, CH. 1010.)

The Legislature finds that the use by any person, including a pupil, of any electronic listening or recording device in any classroom of the elementary and secondary schools without the prior consent of the teacher and the principal of the school given to promote an educational purpose disrupts and impairs the teaching process and discipline in the elementary and secondary schools, and such use is prohibited. Any person, other than a pupil, who willfully violates this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

Any pupil violating this section shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

This section shall not be construed as affecting the powers, rights, and liabilities arising from the use of electronic listening or recording devices as provided for by any other provision of law.

ED CODE 43500

For purposes of this part, the following definitions apply:

- (a) “Distance learning” means instruction in which the pupil and instructor are in different locations and pupils are under the general supervision of a certificated employee of the local educational agency. Distance learning may include, but is not limited to, all of the following:
 - (1) Interaction, instruction, and check-ins between teachers and pupils through the use of a computer or communications technology.
 - (2) Video or audio instruction in which the primary mode of communication between the pupil and certificated employee is online interaction, instructional television, video, telecourses, or other instruction that relies on computer or communications technology.
 - (3) The use of print materials incorporating assignments that are the subject of written or oral feedback.
- (b) “In-person instruction” means instruction under the immediate physical supervision and control of a certificated employee of the local educational agency while engaged in educational activities required of the pupil.
- (c) “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education, or charter school, excluding a charter school classified as a non-classroom based charter school pursuant to Sections 47612.5 and 47634.2 as of the 2019–20 fiscal year.

(Added by Stats. 2020, Ch. 24, Sec. 34. (SB 98) Effective June 29, 2020. Inoperative June 30, 2021. Repealed as of January 1, 2022, pursuant to Section 43511.)

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ASSESSING HOME ENVIRONMENTS THROUGH REMOTE INSTRUCTION

During remote learning, educators will interact with students and their families on a regular basis through phone calls, emails and video conferencing. In addition, food service staff can engage with students and their families during food distribution. These interactions with students and families are opportunities to identify potential student safety needs. The following guidance is offered to districts who may not have the internal professional resources and expertise to address student welfare concerns in the home.

Educators and school personnel may have a variety of experiences when engaging with students and their families that could raise concerns for abuse or neglect. Signs can include:

- unusual or strained responses to questions,
- the tone of an interaction, or
- an inability to make contact with a child or caregiver may reveal stressors or circumstances that could signal a safety concern and may require a report to child protective services.

QUESTIONS TO PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

Q: Is now a good time to talk? If not, is there a better time for me to call?

1. Is everyone OK?
2. Is there someone I can call for you?
3. Are there any safety concerns for you or your children?
4. Do you need help right now?

Q: How are things going with your child's education at home?

1. What is going well?
2. Is your child struggling with schoolwork?
3. Do you have any concerns you would like to discuss?

Q: Is everyone able to get what they need to get by (for example, food, clothing, housing, medical care)?

1. Are you able to access what you need to care for your family?
2. What would help?
3. Who can help you?
4. Do you have supportive family, friends or neighbors to help you and your children?

Q: What is it like for your family to be staying home without any breaks? How is everyone getting along with each other?

1. How is everyone passing the time?
2. Do you have activities you do together?
3. Do you need ideas?

4. How are you providing downtime or “away” time for family members when needed?
5. How is everyone coping with stress?
6. Are you finding it difficult to bounce back or manage?
7. Is anyone having a hard time?
8. What seems to be bothering them the most?
9. What makes it better or worse?

Q: How are things going with your child’s behavior and social or emotional health?

1. Have you noticed changes in your child’s behavior? Are you concerned?
2. Who were your children connected to outside the home before the pandemic began?
3. How are they staying in touch with those friends?
4. Does your child seem more anxious, scared or depressed?
5. Do you have social, emotional or mental health supports if needed?

QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS

Q: Tell me about how things are going at home. How are things going for you?

1. Are you feeling OK?
2. Are you worried about anything?
3. Give me one word that describes how you feel today?
4. How is learning from home different from learning at school?

Q: Who is taking care of you? How are they doing?

1. Who makes sure you have everything you need?
2. What do they do?
3. Where do you sleep at night?
4. Does anyone else sleep with you?
5. Do you sleep well?
6. Who wakes you up in the morning?
7. Who takes care of you when you get hurt?
8. What do they do?
9. Who goes out and gets food for you?
10. What do you like to eat?
11. Who makes your meals?
12. Who do you eat with?

Q: How is everyone getting along with each other? Is anyone having a hard time?

1. Who lives or stays in your home (including pets)?
2. Who visits?
3. Are you worried about anyone?
4. Why?
5. How can you tell when someone in your home is having a hard time?
6. What do they do?
7. What makes them feel better?

Q: Tell me about what you do all day.

1. What things do you like to do at home?
2. What don't you like to do?
3. Do you have responsibilities at home?
4. What are they?
5. Observe and consider family/child interactions.
6. Does the child seem fearful of the caregiver?
7. Does the caregiver speak for the child directly without allowing the child the opportunity to share?

OBSERVE ANY NON-VERBAL CUES THAT MAY BE INDICATIVE OF POTENTIAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT

1. Does the child demonstrate expressions of pain despite any visible marks or bruises?
2. Does the child seem shutdown?
3. Do members of the home engage in traumatic play?
4. Identify children that were at a higher risk of potential abuse and neglect prior to COVID-19, as they may be especially more impacted now.
5. Pay attention to the background. Are there any safety hazards, either physical or environmental? Can yelling and/or screaming be overheard?
6. How does the child appear in the environment?
7. Be mindful of who may be listening in the background. Ask probing questions such as, what does a day look like at home for you right now? What's your favorite part about being at home? What is the hardest? Avoid yes and no questions if possible.
8. Listen to students' responses both verbal and non-verbal in their body language. Are students or their parents and/or caregivers deflecting or avoiding responses to particular questions? Are parents and/or caregivers interrupting particular questions?
9. Listen to how caregivers describe their interactions with their children. For example, a parent may say, "they are so ill-behaved, next time they act out I'm going to"

10. Ensure students know how to reach out securely and confidentially should they need specific support, counsel or medical treatment that may be sensitive.
11. Continue to let students know you remain a supportive, caring adult in their lives.

OTHER SIGNS OF CONCERN

1. Lack of virtual attendance or homework not completed over a long period of time.
2. If you have had no contact at all with a family after many repeated phone calls/messages.
3. If a child communicates they feel unsafe, you see a child in a dangerous environment, or you notice a significant change in a child's mood/behavior.
4. Make an extra effort with children who:
 - Have a history of emotional, sexual, physical abuse or neglect, drug use, or discussed/attempted suicide.
 - Are responsible for the care of other children or live in a highly stressful family situation with limited support systems.
 - Require assistance due to physical, mental, behavioral, or medical disabilities or delays