

**Effective Practices Engaging and Supporting Diverse Learners ​​​​​​​in a COVID-19 Virtual Environment – May 6, 2020 8pm**

*A discussion of how to support diverse learners in a virtual learning environment*

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 Tamar Benjamin- 2&3 grade teacher at the Maimonides School in Brookline, MA

* Our students are the same students we had at the beginning of the school year so the same way we would support them while school was in session remains the same now.
* I prefer asynchronous learning.  It ensures that everything is clear and accessible to all students.
* I always post a daily schedule. The schedule has easy links for students to access the class.
* Greeting students is still very important - I have a morning message and a prompt using flip grid, it is a great tool because I can prepare video messages for the students and they can easily respond through video.  It allows all children to speak up, even a child with anxiety who would never speak up in class is using flip grid all of the time.
* It is also helpful to have asynchronous learning because students can go back and review if they missed something. They can also choose what order they do their work.
* I do a lot of pre-recording to teach a lesson link work for the students to the recording.
* I am continuing to group students according to their level in breakout rooms.
* I am clearly demonstrating what I expect the students to do, very explicitly. Perhaps even more than before because I am not there to help them in person.  This way they always have a model of what is expected with clear directions.
* It is so important to partner with the parents.  Parents are seeing the curriculum more than before.  I will send a letter on Sundays with everything they will be doing during the week and required supplies.
* Teachers need to modify and not overwhelm the students.  It is ok if they do not cover everything that was planned by the end of the school year. If I think a child may struggle with a particular lesson, I will send notes home to the parents ahead of time.
* Parents should let their kids be flexible in terms of seating and space.
* I prepare a lot of cheat sheets so that students and parents easily have links and passwords and images of how to log in.
* I try to maintain a predictable schedule. Classes that met 4 times a week should still meet 4 times a week.  Something that takes place on Friday stays on Friday.  I am trying not to introduce too many new things at once as it can be overwhelming for the students.
* A strong partnership with parents has really paid off.  Keep parents informed of the schedule so that they can be helpful. Try to find a balance of time on the screen and time that they are working off screen.  I surveyed parents for what games they had a home so that she could have the students use manipulatives- you can also send virtual manipulatives.
* It is important to find a way to help students who need a little more support. There are different ways that they can demonstrate that they are learning the material- i.e. they can make a video instead of needing to write if they fatigue easily.
* With asynchronous learning, I’ve had time for more office hours so that I can check in one-on-one with students who may need a little more support.
* You do not need to reinvent the wheel- do not start over, stay the flexible teacher you always have been and see what you can use that you already have in place and target your time for helping the students thrive.

Mia Hyman- Behavior Specialist for Gateways: Access to Jewish Education

In school we always stress to teachers that when we are making a support plan for students, focus on preventative strategies. The following are preventative strategies to keep students focused and demonstrate positive behavior during on-line learning.

1. **Workspace**

* The workspace should be comfortable but not cluttered. Have all supplies and materials ready to go.
  + Provide parents with a checklist of what should be in the space. Once you have shared a checklist you can refer back to it if you are seeing that a student is having difficulty focusing.
* Teachers have reported that students have been playing with toys (fidget or focus tools) during Zoom lessons.  Have the students choose three items to be their tools that they can use in class. If they start using the tool in a way that does not help focus, you can ask the child to put it aside and use another tool.
* Use and take advantage of the Zoom features to help students stay on task. In the security settings, you can turn off the chat and renaming features. You can also prevent students from unmuting themselves.

1. **Visual Supports**

* Your classroom most likely is filled with helpful visual supports. Visual schedules are so important and so helpful in order to keep routines in order to decrease anxiety and stress.
* One class uses the same visual schedule daily and they go over it everyday.  This helps to remind students of class expectations and helps non-readers who may need the pictures to help them.
* Visual reminders of classroom expectations are important. The physical classroom has clear expectations and the Zoom classroom has the same. In that regard, we’ve seen an effort towards consistency between in-person and Zoom classroom expectations.
* It can be helpful to take a picture of what tools students will need and share that out. This helps students know what is expected and can show you that they are ready to learn.
* Visual supports are just as important for mental health as they are for academics.  Kids love emojis and can use them to express how they are feeling.  Brainstorm strategies to move from one feeling to another.
* You can find all kinds of manipulatives at home… Clothespins are a great investment. There are so many different activities you can do with manipulatives and they are a great tool to keep students on task.  Students also love to write on old toys that they are no longer using.
* There are a lot of educational videos on the internet, many are free.  Students often enjoy learning from new voices.

1. **Incorporate interests**

* You can use apps to have different shapes or things that the students are interested in, talk and teach the lesson with your voice.
* If you can’t beat them join them!  Use their phones as a tool to answer questions.

1. **Active Participation**

* It is helpful to use tools as a way of actively participating during a Zoom lesson.   Students can hold up a true or false card or play Bingo, looking for words and images that they are listening for.
* When students are trying to get attention from other students, you can give them an assignment so that they have a way to get attention in a positive way.  Have the kids keep track of how often you say or do a certain word to help keep their attention and listening.  You can also use poll sheets so that they can ask each other questions.
* Student presentations are a great way for students to show their knowledge and get the attention they want. For students who shy away from attention, often it’s easier to present over Zoom than in the classroom.

1. **Self-monitoring**

* Prepare a form or checklist of tasks for students to track what they’re doing. You can also prepare a rating sheet to see how the students rate themselves and then have a discussion on what they are seeing and what you are seeing.  This is such an important skill to be able to self-monitor so is a great thing to emphasize now.

1. **Practice and repetition**

* Offer office hours or ask students to stay back after class ends.  There is a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative praise to students and we are seeing kids be more productive when they receive that positive praise and acknowledgement.
* It is so important to keep your teaching sense of humor. Find funny videos to laugh at.  This is hard but it is important to take care of yourselves and not to worry about making sure that you complete everything by the end of the year.

**Questions asked at the end of the presentation:**

*How will you start the year if we are still virtual? So much of what was said is based on continuing what you started at the beginning of the year?*

Keep the focus on the social-emotional and making connections before diving into the academics. Use the book the first 6 weeks of school.  Capitalize on snail mail, I’m sure students will love to get letters from you. Ask them to write back and share their interests.

*How much prep time does Tamar do?*

It is definitely considerably more.  The first three days were like the first three days of school but we settled in and got into a routine.  It has gotten a lot easier.  I use Sundays to prepare as much as I can, if you can front load ahead of time then you can just upload as you go.  I like to do a month at a glance and know what is coming up ahead.