

Distance Learning Plan Template

This template is intended to support Minnesota school districts and charters in ensuring they have meaningful, relevant, and equitable learning plans in place to address the needs of all students. Districts are not required to use this template and can use whatever formats support their distance learning programming. Districts are not asked to submit their distance learning plans to MDE.

Distance Learning Defined: Students engaging in distance learning have access to appropriate educational materials and receive daily interaction with their licensed teacher(s).

It is important to note that distance learning does not always mean e-learning or online learning. It is critical to provide this learning in a format that can be equitably accessed by all students.

Overall Equity Considerations

- Who are the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other marginalized groups that are affected by the distance learning plan? What are the potential impacts on these groups?
- Does the distance learning plan ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences? Who does the distance learning plan benefit?
- How have we intentionally involved stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by the distance learning plan? How have stakeholders and community members validated or invalidated our conclusions to questions 1 and 2?
- List all the potential barriers (structural, human, financial, community, etc.) to more equitable outcomes related to the distance learning plan.
- How will we mitigate the negative impacts and address the barriers identified above?
- Once the distance learning plan has been implemented, how will we gather and use the input from those impacted?
- What qualitative and quantitative evidence will we gather and analyze to determine the effects of the distance learning plan?

Template

- 1. How are we ensuring students have access to appropriate educational materials, including technology?**

Additional considerations

- If we are using an online learning system, how are we ensuring it can effectively support the district's unique learning and teaching needs, including the ability to provide differentiated instruction as well as one-on-one support for students who need it? [See text below](#)
- If we are using an online learning system, what additional options are being made for students and families who will not have access to this system? How will we ensure that the options are of the same, if not better, quality than the system students and families cannot access? [51-53](#)
- If we are delivering materials or asking families to pick up materials, who are the families that will have barriers to getting materials? How will we address those barriers? [51](#)
- How are we ensuring that a variety of educational resources that reflect multiple and silenced perspectives are being identified and used? [See text below](#)
- How are we ensuring that our distance learning model is secure and will not allow for the release of protected student or staff information? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

Subject-specific teachers proactively monitor each student's progress using Connexus and through regular contact via phone, streaming audio and video (LiveLesson sessions), and WebMail messages (our Connexus-based email system). Subject-specific teachers provide small and large group instruction to their students on key concepts and skills; add, expand, or modify assessments based on the student's demonstrated mastery of the material; assign and score assessments and portfolio items; and provide feedback on the student's performance to the student, Learning Coach, and Family Connections Coordinator, or homeroom/advisory teacher.

Connections Academy teachers work with Learning Coaches and students to customize student learning experiences based on specific academic needs, learning pace, learning styles, and personal interests. This program personalization is an ongoing process that also includes the creation of a written plan (the Personalized Learning Plan, or PLP) that all members of the learning team follow.

Connexus contains personally identifiable information that is maintained and accessible by third parties (such as service providers, content partners or vendors). These third parties are provided access to the minimum amount of information required to allow them to perform the tasks for which they have been engaged. Such third parties have agreed to maintain the confidentiality of such information and to use or disclose it only for the work they are performing for us, or as permitted by law. Additionally, Connexus contains "student educational records" that will be protected by Connections in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") and applicable state laws, and we will only retain and disclose educational records or provide access to them in compliance with applicable law.

Page numbers noted after each bullet point refer to the document linked here:

[Falcon View Connections Academy School Handbook Supplement](#)

2. How are we ensuring students receive daily interaction with their licensed teacher(s)?

Additional considerations

- How are we defining engagement and student-teacher interactions? What are our expectations? [See text below](#)
- How are families' perspectives and experiences centered in our efforts to engage students in learning and interactions with their teachers? [11](#)
- How will we determine and support the various modes by which teachers can interact and engage with students? [See text below](#)
- How will teachers be culturally responsive and relevant during their distant learning interactions with students? [See text below](#)
- How will we utilize support staff to engage with students and families? [12](#)

Our plan:

Connections Academy expects that most students will have daily contact with their teachers through a combination of phone calls, WebMail messages, LiveLesson sessions, face-to-face interaction, and the daily review of assessments via the electronic Grade Book. At a minimum, all students will interact synchronously (e.g., via phone, LiveLesson session, or face-to-face) with a teacher every two weeks so the teacher is able to monitor academic progress and verify student learning.

Practices that exclude, deny benefits to, or otherwise discriminate against any person on the basis of ethnic group identification/ethnicity, marital status, race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, physical or mental disability, athletic performance, language proficiency in English or another language, prior academic achievement, or age in the admission to, participation in, or receipt of the services under any of the Connections Academy and its affiliated entities educational programs and activities, or in employment practices are strictly prohibited.

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3. How will we support the mental health needs of students?

Additional considerations

- What information will we share with families regarding mental health services and supports? [See text below](#)
- What community resources and partnerships can be used or leveraged to help support students and families? [See text below](#)
- How can online resources and resources that don't require internet access be used to support students and families? [See text below](#)
- How will we support students who are not connected to a mental health provider? [See text below](#)
- How will we assist families in obtaining medical assistance benefits? [See text below](#)

- How will we assist students who are participating in telehealth options via school linked mental health providers? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

Use of the internet is a requirement for the Connections Academy program. Caretakers are responsible for arranging for broadband internet service to be available during the school year. Broadband internet service must meet minimum standards for speed, availability, and compatibility to meet Connexus requirements.

Connections Academy takes student safety and well-being very seriously, and believes that students should be able to learn in a safe and comfortable environment. Therefore, in addition to the comprehensive set of required courses and trainings for school staff that focus on educational practices, teachers are required to take the following course:

Students in Distress: Recognizing and Responding: This course is designed to ensure teachers and other school staff are familiar with the signs of student distress and know how to respond promptly and professionally when they observe such signs or behaviors.

The Student Support Team (SST) consists of a number of individuals with various roles at the school, with the goal of supporting struggling students' academic and behavioral needs. The SST may be comprised of teachers, staff members, administrators, school counselors, intervention specialists, parents as needed, and others at the school who may have knowledge of student performance and needs. The SST meets regularly to discuss individual students referred to the team by school staff or parents. Concerns may be related to academic, performance, engagement, or physical and mental health. Students are identified as needing additional support based on universal screening assessments conducted with all students, teacher and/or Learning Coach observation and knowledge of the student, and/or a review of the student's academic performance, participation, and/or attendance levels documented in Connexus.

4. How will the needs of students with IEPs be met?

Additional considerations

- How will lessons be delivered to accommodate students with 504 plans? [32-33](#)
- How will students receive support from their teachers and support staff? [30-31](#)
- What online and non-internet mandatory resources are available to help support students with IEPs? [30-31](#)
- How will we measure IEP goals? How will data be collected? [See text below](#)
- How will we ensure we meet evaluation requirements within legal timelines? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

The school complies with the requirements described in the IDEA as well as state special education regulations and statutes in order to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students who have a qualifying disability under the IDEA. In general, this includes (but is not limited to) identifying and evaluating the needs of students with disabilities under the IDEA, developing and revising Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), determining appropriate placements in the least restrictive environment for students with IEPs, implementing IEPs in the appropriate placement determined by the IEP team, considering continued eligibility for special education and related services, and developing and implementing transition plans to prepare for post-secondary transition after high school. When a student initially enrolls in Connections Academy with an existing IEP, the

school either implements the IEP as written or provides the student with comparable services until a new IEP is developed or amended by the IEP team. Specially designed instruction for students with IEPs is most often delivered in LiveLesson sessions. In the virtual environment, FAPE is provided in the LiveLesson classroom, including instruction from a special education teacher. Related services are most commonly provided in the virtual environment according to students' needs in order to provide FAPE. It is important for students receiving special education and related services to attend these sessions designed to address their IEP goals.

Page numbers noted after each bullet point refer to the document linked here:

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5. How will we ensure students have internet access as needed?

Additional considerations

- How can we work with local internet providers to obtain internet access for students and families? 52-53
- Keeping in mind that all areas will not have the capacity to offer internet access to students and families, what additional options can be used to get students and families the materials, resources and support that they need? See text below

Our plan:

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6. How will meal delivery or distribution occur?

Additional considerations

- If we are delivering meals or asking families to pick up meals, who are the families that will have barriers to getting materials? How will we address those barriers? N/A
- If we are delivering or asking families to pick up meals for multiple days, how will we ensure homeless students can refrigerate and store food? N/A
- [Additional food and nutrition resources.](#)

Our plan: N/A

7. How will we support our English Learners?

Additional considerations

- How will we provide legally required English language development instruction for English learners? [See text below](#)
- How will mainstream teachers provide supports for English learners within their distance learning instruction? [34-36](#)
- How will we communicate distance learning plans to multilingual, multicultural families including translation and interpretation needs? How will we build collaborative networks with community elders, bilingual staff, and cultural organizations to help with outreach and communication? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

Federal and state regulations require that schools determine students' "primary or home language" and take "appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by [their] students in [their] instructional programs." To meet this requirement, Connections Academy asks Caretakers to complete a primary home language survey based on the regulations of the state in which they reside. Responses are then reviewed to identify all students whose primary or home language is not English. Connections Academy schools then administer English Language Proficiency assessments to determine students' language acquisition levels in compliance with federal and/or state law and to determine students' language acquisition levels.

Connections Academy asks Caretakers to complete a primary home language survey. Translation and interpretation services are available and offered as applicable via LanguageLine Solutions.

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8. How will the needs of students experiencing homelessness be met?

Additional considerations

- Do we know which students are experiencing homelessness? [See text below](#)
- Do we have methods in place to maintain communication with students experiencing homelessness? [See text below](#)
- How can we ensure families have access to needed supports? [See text below](#)
- How are we utilizing our liaisons, school counselors, school social workers, and other relevant personnel to conduct outreach? [See text below](#)
- How are we working with our community to ensure access to virtual or distance learning opportunities? [51-53](#)

Our plan:

All Connections Academy schools abide by all federal, state, and local policies and guidelines for student admission and do not impose admission requirements that are inconsistent with these policies and guidelines.

These policies and guidelines include compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act regarding homeless students, including but not limited to, enrolling homeless students in a timely manner even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment (e.g., proof of residency or previous academic records), and providing those students with services comparable to services offered to students not experiencing homelessness. The school leader or his/her designee shall serve as the liaison for homeless students.

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9. How will Early Learning occur?

Additional considerations

- Since preschool learners are not as independent as older learners, how will learning be embedded in routines so families are not overwhelmed? **N/A**
- How will we support families of our youngest learners in using screen time as a support to, and not instead of, adult-child interaction? **N/A**
- How will activities accommodate hands-on experiences when families may not have a variety of materials? How will materials be provided, delivered and returned? **N/A**
- How will all learning areas be addressed such as creative play, real-life exploration, physical activity, language development, and social interactions? **N/A**
- How might family members like grandparents and older siblings support the young child's learning? **N/A**

Our plan:

Enrollment is limited to students in Grades K-10.

10. How will we assess our students?

Additional considerations

- What do we believe about assessments and what they are meant to do? **See text below**
- What are the various ways by which students will be assessed for proficiency? **See text below**
- How will we report students' progress? **15-16**

Our plan:

It is essential that student performance is regularly assessed. Our school uses various types of assessments to determine students' skill levels, to evaluate performance, assign educational plans, and to develop a permanent school record.

Teacher feedback is provided through the use of rubrics, assessment grades, phone conferences, WebMail messages, and LiveLesson sessions. Depending on a student's needs and grade level, subject-specific teachers provide instruction in a variety of ways to address the needs of each student. Subject-specific teachers evaluate students in their corresponding subject area(s), provide instructional resources based on the student's learning

needs, prepare student progress reports (at schools that issue them), verify the student's course work, issue final course grades, and make promotion or retention recommendations (for students in grades K–8).

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11. How will we regularly communicate with families?

Additional considerations

- How are families' perspectives and experiences centered in our communication plan? [See text below](#)
- How are we communicating with families who speak a language other than English? [See text below](#)
- How are we ensuring families understand our distance learning model? Use of the model? Student expectations? [See text below](#)
- What are the platforms or apps that adults, students, and families utilize the most? How can these be leveraged to get information to students and families? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

Connections Academy schools apply the term "Caretaker" to the student's parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) who enrolls the student and satisfies the student's enrollment requirements. Caretakers must agree to and sign the Parent/ Learning Coach Acknowledgement (PLCA) as part of the enrollment process. The Get Coaching! Program is designed to assist Learning Coaches and Caretakers in understanding and fulfilling their role in their student's education at a Connections Academy school. Through the Get Coaching! Program, we provide Learning Coaches and Caretakers with ongoing support, provide access to resources and facilitate connections with other Learning Coaches.

Connections Academy asks Caretakers to complete a primary home language survey. Translation and interpretation services are available and offered as applicable via LanguageLine Solutions.

Connexus contains several unique and efficient mechanisms for families and school staff members to communicate with one other. Because Connexus is a closed system, no communication can be made to or from anybody outside of the system: WebMail, Message Boards, LiveLesson sessions, Virtual Library, Home Page Announcements.

12. How will we address the needs of our tribal communities?

Additional considerations

- How are we ensuring our plan is not dependent on students having internet access? [See text below](#)
- Who will be our consistent Indian Education point person to communicate with and advocate for students and their families? [See text below](#)
- What is our plan to regularly communicate with American Indian families? [See text below](#)
- How are we partnering and coordinating our services with local tribes, community organizations, and/or MDE Indian Education personnel to support students and their families? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

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Our Enrollment Specialist and Attendance Coordinator is our Indian Education point person. Our school is partially implementing these services/communications and revisions need to be made.

13. How will we utilize partnerships to meet the needs of vulnerable students?

Additional considerations

- How are we utilizing programming options for school nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, paraprofessionals, and other school specialists and cultural liaisons? [See text below](#)
- Who are our community partners and how are we collaborating to meet students' needs? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

Our community partners include Connections Academy schools across the country. School Counselors and other school specialists collaborate and share resources through regular meetings and sharing sites. The clubs and activities program offers students the opportunity to interact with other Connections Academy school students, regardless of geographic location.

14. How will we meet the needs of staff?

Additional considerations

- How will we ensure consistent, clear communications exist across all staff? [See text below](#)
- How are we providing initial and ongoing training to our staff on our distance learning model and expectations? How will we address problems of practice as they occur? [See text below](#)
- How will we regularly observe distance learning and provide feedback to teachers and staff? [See text below](#)
- How will teachers continue to collaborate in professional learning communities, grade-level teams, subject-area teams, etc.? [See text below](#)
- How are we supporting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of our staff? [See text below](#)
- How will we ensure the resources and professional development available to staff include instruction and guidance on culturally responsive and relevant distant instruction? [See text below](#)

Our plan:

All educational and/or school related communications with teachers, School Leaders, or any school staff member are required to be conducted via the approved tools and platforms provided by Connections Academy. The School Leader is responsible to ensure consistent, clear communications exist across all staff. A

comprehensive Teacher Evaluation and Performance Plan exists which is routinely evaluated and improved based on best practices in online instruction. All Teachers attend weekly meetings within their Professional Learning Community in addition to grade-level team meetings.

All members of school staff must complete required trainings at the beginning of the school year, and refer to the trainings throughout the year as needed. School leadership tracks staff completion of these trainings to ensure all staff members have completed the trainings in the required time frame. Caretakers and Learning Coaches are asked to communicate and collaborate with teachers and other school staff as they work to fulfill their professional roles in supporting student safety and well-being. They are asked to involve additional parties as appropriate to address concerns, and to always keep student safety and well-being at the center of the conversation.

15. How are we tracking attendance of students and staff?

Additional considerations

- How is attendance being defined? Are there additional ways by which attendance can be defined or achieved? 10-15
- How are we communicating attendance procedures and expectations to students and families? 10-15
- How are our practices for tracking attendance equitable? What considerations are we making for students and families that cannot connect via the internet? See text below

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16. How will we assess and adjust our distance learning plan during implementation?

Additional considerations

- What data and information will we collect to assess the implementation and impacts of our distance learning plan? See text below
- Who will monitor impacts? How frequently? See text below
- How will impacts be communicated to appropriate stakeholders, including families? See text below
- How will we monitor whether our distance learning plan is benefitting some students and presenting learning barriers to others? See text below

Our plan:

Our school assesses and adjusts our plans by developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan (SIP). Our SIP consists of Action Plans which are aligned to SMART goals and contain clear benchmarks at specific points in the year in order to measure progress toward the stated goals. Action steps are communicated to all stakeholders during quarterly staff meetings. When applicable, families are notified prior to implementing changes to processes or programs. Staff meet every two weeks to monitor progress. Student performance data is monitored on a daily basis. Action steps are developed as trends are uncovered to ensure all students are receiving the educational support they need to succeed.