MACUL guidelines for helping classroom teachers transition to online learning

Teaching online is difficult and challenging work. Nobody can learn to teach and learn well online in a couple of days, weeks or even months. As the nation asks our face to face educators to transition to an online format, MACUL is providing some guidelines to consider so that these new online classes are equitable and continue to provide a free and fair education for all students. MACUL also recognizes that it is a stressful time for teachers, students and families and hopes to help alleviate some of the stress with these guidelines. The leaders at MACUL are experts in education technology and many aspects of online learning, they share their advice in the guidelines below.

1. **Survey ALL Students**
   Make sure that you survey families/students about their access to digital devices and WiFi. This is an example survey that could be modified. This data gleaned from the survey can help you decide what devices and resources to use for online learning based on the access of your students. Make sure you get a 100% response rate.

2. **Equity: Connectivity and Devices**
   Online learning can create even more educational gaps if we are not careful. It is important that every single one of your students can fully access and participate in the course activities. Even in an affluent district there are students and families who are not connected or underconnected. Thus, while Comcast and other service providers (see Everyoneon for listings in your area) are offering free WiFi for Free and Reduced Lunch families, it still needs to be set up and that will take time. Keep in mind that some rural areas in the U.S. do not have many providers (so the free comcast option is not an option for rural families) and you may need to use cell phones as hotspots (or just send text or email messages that can be easily accessed on the phone). Families also need devices that can run the WiFi as well. Thus, every single family needs to be checked in on to see if they are connected and how well they are connected and if they need to borrow district devices (districts should be lending out classroom devices to families). Also, the district should consider sending trainers (or having a hotline) to homes to check

in on students and their families to make sure they know how to connect to resources and use them properly.

3. **Tools**
It is imperative to use digital tools that students and teachers are already comfortable using. While many edtech companies are generously offering free versions of their tools right now, this is not a time to ask both students and teachers to try to learn many new tools at one time. Avoid using tools that you have not tested with students or on their devices. By keeping the same tools that students have used in their face to face classrooms, the transition is much easier for them. For example, if your school already uses an LMS like Google Classroom with the Google Suite, use those. Or if your school already uses Seesaw, use that. Furthermore post assignments, information in those tools. Finally, ask/require all teachers in the same school to use the same tools so that the students are not overwhelmed by having to learn and/or download numerous new digital applications.

4. **Asynchronous Or Synchronous?**
Once again, equity is key when teaching online. ALL students need to be able to access the materials, resources and learning. This means that asynchronous makes more sense to meeting "free and fair education for all" standard, than synchronous rooms for required online meet-ups or class sessions. Most synchronous live streaming webinar rooms require a lot of bandwidth, and apps to download to devices. This may not be an option for some of your students, so keep it simple by going asynchronous as much as possible. This also allows for self-pacing in getting assignments completed. Here is a link to some step by step suggestions for developing asynchronous and synchronous solutions.

5. **Consider Extending Deadlines and Modifying Assignments**
Doing activities online usually takes twice as long as face to face. Thus, consider changing the deadlines and criteria for an assignment so that it is reasonable to complete for your students in these circumstances. Some curriculum may need to be changed in light of the students no longer being in the classroom. Allow yourself this flexibility to adjust to something that is more reasonable for students to complete at home.

6. **Feedback and Scaffolds**
When you teach online, feedback and scaffolds are vital. Thus, teachers should consider creating smaller assignments with many check in points, rather than a large project where you do not check in until the end. A hyperdoc is a good example of providing basic scaffolds in a Google document or Google slide.

7. **Encourage Real World Learning**

This is an opportunity to base assignments and activities that relate to students' everyday lives. If they are at home, ask them to do things around the home (such as mathematical measurements, gathering biology from their lawns, making something with things they find at home...etc).

8. **Clear is Kind**

Set clear expectations for students, so they know exactly what is required, what is optional and how to access and achieve success. Let them know where to go for help. Also, assume that some parents will not be able to easily support their children, so do your best to create independent work that children can do on their own without much parental assistance.

9. **Mental Health Checks**

Our students are stressed and anxious about all the changes, we need to build in time to do check-ins. Some students may be home alone or required to babysit siblings. Checking in to make sure they are well is important right now. These check-ins can occur through systems you already have in place to communicate with students and/or their families, such as email, text alert feeds, phone calls, or even a knock on the door (we recommend you go with another district employee and not alone, and let parents know you are coming). If you have ELLs, you may want to use Talking Points for text messages. Encourage your students to take breaks from their screens. Make an assignment to go outside and play or read a book or read a book with another person at home, all the assignments do not have to be digital. You can also record videos or share your own images to connect with your students and families, some ideas from PBS here.

10. **Take Care of Yourself**

Be kind to yourself. It takes years to do online teaching well, and you have been given days. Use tools and resources you are already comfortable with, be transparent with your students that this is new for you too, and ask for feedback from them (often). The most important thing you can do is be there for your students and if a few academic units struggle, do not stress about it, you are doing all that you can and that is enough. Take screen breaks, and take walks or read a book. It will help to refresh your brain and energy.