

NPS Distance Learning Plan



This plan is provided in preparation for an extended school closure and supports distance learning. Currently, our return to school date is May 4, 2020, but it may be longer if national, state and/or local officials and/or health experts deem it necessary to maintain the health and safety of our community. Beginning on April 6th, and until school closure is ended, the following distance learning plan will remain in effect.

Overview

The Purpose of Distance Learning in NPS

Newton Public Schools' mission statement elevates educational equity, social emotional learning and support for all learners as the cornerstones of our collective work as a district. Our work as educators continues to be guided by these values as we establish our distance learning practices in our day to day work with students, families and colleagues. Consistent with [guidance provided by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#), the purpose of distance learning in the Newton Public Schools will be to engage students in deeper learning while also maintaining connectedness as a community.

It is our intention to partner with families to keep our students emotionally and physically safe, fed, and engaged in learning. Indeed, a strong partnership between home and school is essential to support our students during this unprecedented time. While parents/caregivers are not expected to become the sole provider of their children's educational content, parental involvement is critical for facilitating students' access to learning materials, resources, and structures in a remote learning plan. With a strong partnership between families and schools, we can deepen students' existing learning during an unprecedented time.

Goals of this plan:

- Recognize the **paradigm shift** necessary to continue learning in a healthy way for students, staff and families.
- Create a weekly **student experience** in each course and overall that incorporates the needs of students with disabilities, ELL students, and all learners
- Create weekly **teacher/staff expectation** and experience, specific to staff roles
- Identify **teamwork and support for teams** as crucial to supporting individual teachers with highly varied bandwidths, both personally and technologically.
- Emphasize **universal design** from the start to ensure expectations can be met and support can be accessed by all students.
- Begin to **rethink special education and other supports** in a distance learning environment.
- Build a learning plan that **acknowledges not all students and staff may be able to access the internet consistently** on an individual device at set times.
- Create a plan for students to complete the school year, the courses they are enrolled in, and receive full credit, with a reduction in content learning expected due to the school closure.

Distance Learning Assumptions

Instructional practices for distance learning cannot be equivalent to the traditional classroom setting. In very short order, parents and guardians have had to increase the amount of time spent supporting their children's learning at home while juggling other personal, familial and/or professional responsibilities. Additionally, our educators, while balancing the same challenges as our families, have had to acquire new skills, expertise, and ways of working and collaborating to support the learners we care so deeply for. As a result, we recognize that our instructional practices must be more sensitive than ever to the range of social emotional and academic needs our students and families are experiencing due to the world-wide health crisis. As the COVID-19 pandemic shifts the ways in which we exist and interact as global citizens, we must continue to focus upon providing equitable educational access for all of our learners as we adapt our schooling practices.

Table of Contents

1. [Preschool Plan](#) (Separate document)
2. [Elementary School Plan](#)
3. [High School Plan](#)
4. [General Distance Learning Guidelines for Families](#)

Elementary School Plan

Elementary Student Engagement and Participation

- As indicated by state guidelines, students will work for approximately 3 hours per day. Students are not expected to complete homework beyond that amount of time.
- If students are not able to make a check-in session or complete a subset of activities, they or their parents should feel free to contact the teacher for follow up.
- Teachers may reach out to students and/or their families if students are not participating in or completing activities.
- If parents have concerns about their child accessing resources, completing tasks, or submitting work, they may contact the classroom teacher.
- Teachers will recognize that student evidence of learning may differ based on what is submitted by each individual student and can be influenced by the level of connectivity, support, and other factors.
- Teachers will not be taking daily attendance, however, teachers will keep track of student check-ins (i.e. any time they have contact with a student, including during class meeting-style check-ins, via email, etc.).

Plan for students who are not able to join any live sessions or who need additional scaffolding to engage with distance learning lessons

- Based on teacher collected data on class meetings, teachers can follow up by phone/email/text to create a plan to encourage participation or provide them assignments in alternate forms.

- Additional supports for students with disabilities and ELLs are also listed in the educator expectations section.
- To the extent possible, learning materials in paper form will be distributed to students weekly.

Academic Goals and Expectations

- The most important outcome is for students to feel cared for and supported by their teachers and to be meaningfully engaged in learning activities for some portion of each day. Regular communication with students and families will help maintain a sense of classroom community and is strongly encouraged.
- For classroom teachers, daily communication will occur through a combination of Zoom meetings and greetings (written, audio and/or video recorded) posted for student access. In addition, teachers may also send out group emails or posts, provide written feedback on student work, or conduct check-ins with students and parents through video or phone calls. Check in meetings can be with small groups, as a whole class or, in certain cases, one-to-one. The teacher determines what mode works best. Whole class teacher Zoom meetings are expected to last approximately 15 minutes, and occur twice per week.
- Direct instruction should be provided in recorded or independent “asynchronous” activities, typically accompanied by a mini lesson. Mini lessons and asynchronistic activities might include screencasts, publicly available online videos (e.g. Khan Academy, PBS videos), teacher created videos, or other assigned activities or readings.
- Consider Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in creating lessons, choices and activities for distance learning. UDL resources might include office hours, discussions, community building activities, or small group check-ins. Given that all students may not be able to attend these sessions, additional outreach and support should be offered to those who cannot attend in real time.
- No summative assessments should be administered.
- Learning plans are to:
 - be made accessible to parents and students by 8:30am each school day. When appropriate, materials may be presented in a weekly format.
 - include a menu of options of possible activities to deepen learning, introduce new learning and enrich the curriculum.
 - Represent approximately half (at most) of what students would be expected to accomplish in class.

To achieve these ends, we have provided the following *guidance* for staff:

- Prioritize relationships and establish routines for class connection before engaging in any form of distance teaching and learning schedule.
- Consult and co-plan with relevant colleagues (e.g., classroom aides, general education, special education, teachers of English Language Learners, specialists, math coaches, and literacy specialists), understanding that special educators and teachers of ELLs have instructional responsibilities in addition.
- Design assignments that enable students to engage in regular practice and exploration through activities which may or may not culminate in a tangible product of some kind.
- Explore current events and foster critical thinking by integrating media, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills into multifaceted lessons.
- Consider non-digital activities to foster wellness, life skills or experiential learning,

utilizing ground materials (e.g., choose five objects that are around you and describe them in detail), journals, photos, etc.

General Expectations for Elementary School Educators:

- Check and answer emails from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators daily during the week. Refer challenging inquiries or requests to an administrator.
- Participate in online group meetings weekly (including faculty, team, student 504 and IEP meetings, etc) to develop distance learning activities.
- Participate in professional development and learning focused on online tools to support distance learning, including Aspen, Google Docs, Google Slides, Google Classroom, Google Meets, and Zoom.
- Participate in additional professional development activities offered by NPS, including possible book study, online courses, and technology support. (Possible topics include culturally responsive teaching, universal design for learning, and technology integration).
- Review and follow NPS [Video Conferencing Guidelines for Faculty](#).
- Please see additional K-5 Educator Role Specific Expectations accessible [here](#).

Expectations and Support for Elementary School Planning Teams

- Teams should meet weekly via Google Meets or Zoom, as indicated in school based virtual meeting schedules. Team meetings should be scheduled with support from administration to ensure building administrators, coordinators, special educators and other specialists can participate, as needed.
- All teams should create a Google Doc Agenda and Notes doc to share with Building Admin, Curriculum Coordinators and Collaborators.
- In order to support each staff member's personal and home needs, teams can share responsibility for developing content, providing instruction, providing office hours, collecting assignments, etc.
- Teams should create a shared weekly academic experience for students. Plans should be made in collaboration with special educators, ELL teachers and other specialists in order to develop appropriate independent tasks and sufficient choices to be accessible to all students. Teams should create a shared communication for students and families about the learning activities for the week, using a template provided. Sample weekly communication templates are available for educators of [Kindergarten, first and second grades](#), and [Grades 3-5](#).
- Teachers will have access to a bank of curricular resources [Recommendations for Distance Learning](#) compiled by Elementary Curriculum coordinators. New content will be added weekly to support planning for the week ahead.
- Weekly plans should be made accessible to parents and students, with all daily content accessible by 8:30am each school day. When appropriate, materials may be presented in a weekly format.

Modes of Communication with Elementary Students and Families

Opportunities for communication in a distance learning environment include:

- Daily Classroom Meeting or Greeting: Synchronous (live) using Zoom conferencing and asynchronous (recorded or written) classroom meetings to take place twice during school hours

- Instructional and Enrichment Opportunities: Using a combination of Google Docs, Google Slides, Google Classroom, and/or other tools already in use by classroom and specialist teachers.
- Student Check Ins: Teachers will check in with families and students to monitor the level at which a student/family is able to access and manage the lessons and activities.
- Gmail: Student Gmail accounts will be turned on and active for internal communication only.
- Parent Engagement: Classroom teachers, social workers, school psychologists will be available for “check-ins” to assess student needs during this time.
- Resources and technical support will be available from the Information Technology department. Please view the [Top 10 Tech Tips For Distance Learning K-5](#) as it contains many tools to assist with distance learning. Teachers and teaching teams are encouraged to reach out to building based Instructional Technology Specialists for support as needed.

Middle School Plan

General Expectations for Middle School Students

- As indicated by state guidelines, students will work for approximately 3.25 hours per day including "live sessions" and independent learning activities. Students are not expected to complete homework beyond that amount of time.
- There should be approximately 2.5 hours per week of learning activities for each full class at the middle school level.
- [NPS Distance Learning Middle School Schedule](#) outlines the schedule and basic expectations for students and staff.
- Students and their families should receive a weekly communication from their teaching team about the assignments and expectations for the week using [a common template](#).

Academic Goals and Expectations

- The goal of courses will be to introduce reasonable measured doses of content with opportunities to practice, process, apply and reflect each week.
- Students will have choices among learning options as much as possible to ensure accessibility of tasks for all learners.
- Students will complete engaging, differentiated tasks regularly and receive feedback on their work and growth from their teachers.
- Classes will not have high-stakes summative assessments (except in special circumstances)
- Teachers will emphasize informal, formative assessments with a lot of opportunity to give feedback to students
- There should be flexibility for assignment completion dates based on individual circumstances.

Credit and Grading

- Goal is for students to receive full credit for the year.
- Students will receive feedback from their teachers and this feedback will replace letter grades.
- All work will be graded Pass/Fail during school closure.

- Middle schools will clarify their grading practices once the end date for the school closure is finalized.

Plan for students who are not able to join any live sessions or who need additional scaffolding to engage with distance learning lessons

- Most live sessions are not required for learning new content, but are offered to help students apply and connect with weekly learning goals.
- Based on lists/data of students not logging in to Schoology or class meetings, teachers or aides follow up by phone/email/text to create a plan for encouraging participation or providing them assignments in alternate forms.
- Counselors will support all students with organization and access to lessons using Universal Design for Learning templates and tips.
- Additional supports for students with disabilities and ELL's are also listed in the educator expectations section.

General Expectations for Middle School Educators:

- Check and answer emails from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators daily during the week. Refer challenging inquiries or requests to an administrator.
- Participate in online group meetings weekly (including faculty, team, GLD, student 504 and IEP meetings, etc) to develop distance learning activities.
- Participate in professional development and learning focused on online tools to support distance learning, including Aspen, Schoology, Google Meets, and Zoom.
- Participate in additional professional development activities offered by NPS, including possible book study, online courses, and technology support. (Possible topics include culturally responsive teaching, universal design for learning, and technology integration).
- Review and follow NPS [Video Conferencing Guidelines for Faculty](#).

Expectations for Middle School Planning Teams

- Teams should meet at least once weekly via Google Meets or Zoom, as indicated in their school schedule.
- In order to support each staff member's personal and home needs, teams can share responsibility for developing content, providing instruction, providing office hours, collecting assignments, etc.
- GLD's should create a shared weekly academic experience for students. Plans should be made in collaboration with special educators, ELL teachers and other specialists in order to develop appropriate independent tasks and sufficient choices to be accessible to all students. [Sample GLD Planning Template](#)
- Teams should create a shared communication for students and families about the learning activities for the week using a template provided. [NPS Student Distance Learning Template](#)
- GLDs should be scheduled with support from administration to ensure building administrators, coordinators, special educators and other specialists can participate.
- All teams should create a Google Doc Agenda and Notes doc to share with Building Admin, Curriculum Coordinators and Collaborators.
- Wherever possible, "singleton" teachers will be able to collaborate with teachers in other schools teaching similar courses.

[Middle School Support for Teacher Teams and Individual Teachers](#)

High School Plan

General Expectations for High School Students

- As indicated by state guidelines, students will work for approximately 3.5 hours per day including "live sessions" and independent learning activities. Students are not expected to complete homework beyond that amount of time.
- There should be approximately 30 minutes of learning activities per class per day (approx. 2.5 hours per class per week).
- [NPS Distance Learning High School Schedule](#) outlines the schedule and basic expectations for students and staff.
- Students and their families should receive a weekly communication from each teacher about the assignments and expectations for the week using [a common template](#)

Academic Goals and Expectations

- The goal of courses will be to introduce reasonable, measured doses of content with opportunities to practice, process and reflect each week.
- Students will have a choice among learning options as much as possible to ensure accessibility of tasks for all learners.
- Students will complete engaging, differentiated tasks regularly and receive feedback on their work and growth from their teachers.
- Classes will not have high-stakes summative assessments (except in special circumstances)
- Teachers will emphasize informal, formative assessments where there is a lot of opportunity to give feedback to students
- There should be flexibility for assignment completion dates based on individual circumstances.

Credit and Grading

- The goal is for students to receive full credit for the year; grading will support students, and will be accessible to all of our students.
- There will be 3 grading periods for the year: Term 1, Term 2, and Term 3 (no Term 4). Term 3 will cover the period from mid-January to the end of the school year.
- T1 and T2 will have letter grades. T3 is Pass/Fail only.
- Final Exams are cancelled.
- Final Grade:
 - Final grade is either a letter grade or P (pass), as below
 - If T3 grade is P, then final grade is average of T1 and T2, or P (student choice by class).
 - If T3 grade is F and student passed T1 or T2, then final grade is P (no option for letter grade)
 - Teachers may consider major assignments and assessment grades from mid-January to March 12th (or make-up work for this period submitted after

March 12th) in the students final grade if the grade helps the students overall grade.

Plan for students who are not able to join any live portions of class or who need additional support to follow our distance learning plans.

- Most live sessions are not required for learning new content, but are offered to help students apply and connect with weekly learning goals.
- Based on lists/data of students not logging in to Schoology or class meetings, teachers or aides follow up by phone to create a plan for encouraging participation or providing them assignments in alternate forms.
- Support staff will support all students with organization and access to lessons using Universal Design for Learning templates and tips.
- Executive Functioning support will be available for any student struggling with the new routine of distance learning.
- Additional supports for students with disabilities and ELLs are also listed in the educator expectations section.

General Expectations for High School Educators:

- Check and answer emails from students, parents, colleagues, and administrators daily during the week. Refer challenging inquiries or requests to an administrator.
- Participate in online group meetings (eg faculty, department, course teams, student 504 and IEP meetings, etc) as needed.
- Participate in professional development and learning focused on online tools to support distance learning, including Aspen, Schoology, Google Meets, and Zoom.
- Participate in additional professional development activities offered by NPS, including possible book study, online courses, and technology support. (Possible topics include culturally responsive teaching, universal design for learning, and technology integration).
- Review and follow NPS [Video Conferencing Guidelines for Faculty](#).

Expectations for High School Planning Teams (Department/course teams, other teams)

- Courses with more than one section
 - To the maximum extent possible teachers of multiple sectioned courses should collaborate with the teachers of the other sections to share resources, lessons and activities.
 - In order to support each staff member's personal and home needs, teams can share responsibility for developing content, providing instruction, providing office hours, collecting assignments, etc.
 - This collaboration could include:
 - Common student expectations - Practice, Process and Reflect
 - Common learning outcomes
 - Common resources to support student learning
 - Common assignments
 - Material to be viewed/explored
 - Material to be completed/practiced and/or turned in
 - Teams should meet weekly, use of shared google documents to share with one another and administrators, and shared access to Schoology courses/resources
- Singleton Courses

- Collaborate when possible with other singleton courses or similar courses in other high schools (if collaboration is not possible, please work with your Department Chair):
 - Common student expectations - Practice, Process and Reflect
 - Common learning outcomes
 - Share model resources to support student learning
 - Share model assignments
 - Material to be viewed/explored
 - Material to be completed/practiced and/or turned in
- Teams should meet weekly, use of shared google documents to share with one another and administrators, and shared access to Schoology courses/resources
- Department Meetings
 - Department Chairs will choose whether to meet as a whole department or provide office hours.
 - Department meetings will be when necessary
 - Department office hours (2 different) sessions at different times/days during the week based on availability of members

High School Support for Teacher Teams and Individual Teachers

High School Educator Support and Expectations

General Distance Learning Guidelines for Families

Schedules and Workload for Students

- Teacher teams and administrators will prioritize key skills and content to emphasize during the closure, acknowledging that we cannot teach all of the same content that we would if school buildings were not closed. Learning activities will be designed to focus on prioritized areas, anticipated to cover approximately 50% of normal scheduled content.
- Families are urged to set up predictable schedules and routines with their children. Classroom teachers will provide suggestions and tips about how to build schedules and routines.
- Resources to assist families are posted here: [NPS Distance Learning Family Resources](#).

Student Attendance and Engagement:

- Teachers will not be taking daily attendance; however, teachers will keep track of student participation in office hours, check-ins and the use of online resources.
- If students are not able to make online sessions or complete a subset of activities, they or their families should feel free to contact the teacher for follow up.
- Teachers may reach out to students and/or their families if students are not participating in or completing activities.
- If parents have concerns about their child accessing resources, completing tasks, or submitting work, please contact the classroom teacher.

- Teachers will recognize that student evidence of learning may differ based on what is submitted by each individual student and can be influenced by the level of connectivity, support, and other factors.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Due to the COVID-19 period of school building closures, the formal Newton Public Schools Elementary Parent/Teacher Conferences are canceled. While we are not holding formal parent/teacher conferences at this time, remote learning will necessitate more frequent communication with families than in the past. NPS staff will work with families and establish a plan for how best to stay in touch during this period of school closure. They may contact you by email, phone or Zoom, and staff will do their best to make proper accommodations if you do not have access to certain modes of communication. We know that all staff will do their best to offer ongoing feedback and support to our students and families.

Special Education Supports

For those students who are supported by an Individual Education Plan (IEP), many of our special education teachers have already been in contact with parents and guardians. Special education teachers and/or related service providers will be reaching out to families again in early April to check in and discuss times for continued communication. The first priority of special educators and related service providers (such as Speech, OT, PT, etc.) is to provide specialized instruction and services to the extent possible given the building closure. A service plan will be developed to provide some services and specialized instruction sessions during this time. Families will be provided with a service plan once the days and times have been identified. They will also be collaborating with related service providers, general educators, and others who support students on IEPs to ensure that recommendations for activities are appropriate and accessible. As always, please do not hesitate to contact your school's Team Specialist with any questions or concerns. We are here for you, and we want to support you.

METCO Supports

Boston-Newton families in need of resources in their local community are welcome to contact the METCO Director, Lisa Gilbert-Smith at gilbertsmithl@newton.k12.ma.us. Emails will be retrieved daily and responded to promptly. METCO staff will continue to contact families to check-in and offer support.

English Language Learner Supports

English Language Learner (ELL) teachers will be reaching out to families in the program to discuss their plan to offer distance learning and to provide support to students and their families. During this time, you can support your child's multilingualism by continuing to speak with each other, learn content, sing songs, and read books in any language(s) you feel comfortable using. A strong home language supports your child's continued learning of English and learning of school content. Please let us know if we can assist in any way by sending an email to our Director of English Language Learning, Allison Levit levita@newton.k12.ma.us or to your child's ELL teacher.

Student Responsible Technology Use and Privacy

Please see [Technology Use Expectations for Families and Students](#) in addition to the information provided below:

- **Student Responsible Technology Use**

- Responsible use of technology by students is part of our curriculum at all grade levels and students are expected to follow the district's [Acceptable Use Policy](#) and [Acceptable Use Guidelines](#). See also the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook](#).
- Students are expected to follow the norms and expectations set by teachers for behavior and participation during online class sessions.
- Students or their guardians should contact their teacher or school administration if they have questions about how to practice these principles in a distance learning setting or to report a violation or abuse. Incidents of Bullying (including Cyberbullying) can also be [reported online](#).
- **Student Privacy**
 - Students may be using commercial websites and online services as part of our distance learning plan. Data sharing with these tools are subject to [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) and we do our best to ensure tools used for educational purposes comply with the [Child Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA\)](#)
 - Some teachers have started using Zoom video conferencing services with students. In compliance with Zoom's [Terms of Service](#), minors should not create accounts with Zoom. Students can still fully participate in Zoom class meetings without an account. Teacher use of Zoom with students is subject to [Zoom's Privacy Policy for K-12 Schools](#).

Who to Contact with Questions

If you have questions regarding support for your child, please reach out to the classroom teacher. If you have general questions, you may feel free to reach out to the school principal for support.

If you need technical support with your child accessing online resources, please email familytechsupport@newton.k12.ma.us.