



Working Virtually with Youth: Equity and Access

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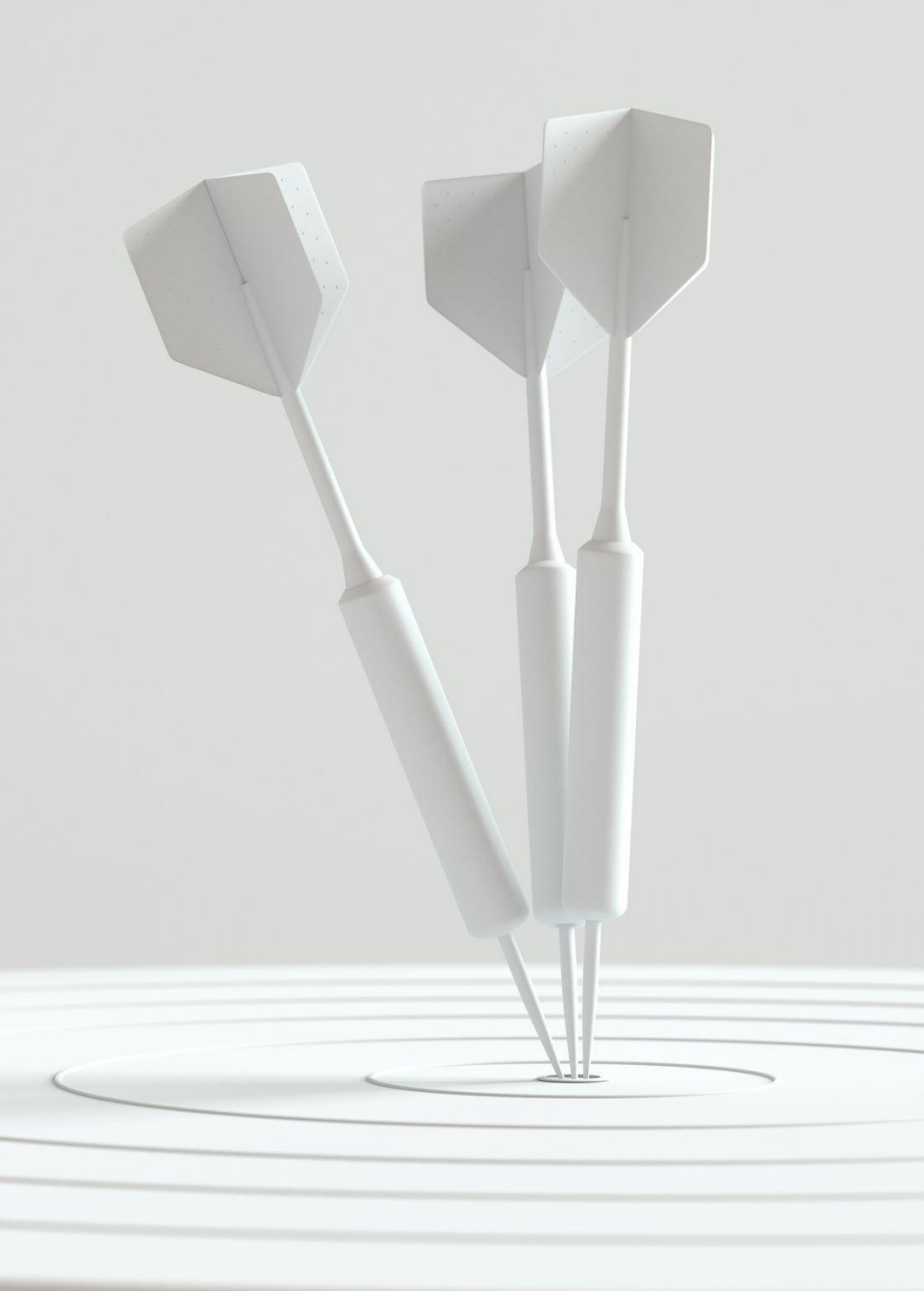
Topics:

Dos and Don'ts

Choosing tech tools and
online activities

Accessing needs through
an equity lens

Dos and Don'ts



Don't

Become overwhelmed by the technology. It's the tool - not the goal.

Don't

Feel pressured to create tons of online experiences.

The quality will not be good and learners may become overloaded.



Do

Focus on supporting your teacher to create and adapt high-quality activities that serve your learners' needs



Do

- Ask your learners or partners what they need. Then come up with a **solution that serves them**. It may not involve much or any technology. For example, you might decide to send activity sheets with school lunch deliveries.
- Remember to make it a high-quality learning experience



Do

- Commit to a schedule to support your learners. Then stay in touch with your learners. They are counting on you.
 - Check on their progress.
 - Update them on meetings that are scheduled, canceled, moved online, etc.

How to choose tech tools:

Use

Use technology tools that you are comfortable with, that your audience is comfortable with, and that serves your program's teaching goals. Start with your school or organization's in-house tech tools.

Choose

Choose technology tools that align with your program's pedagogical principles and that take a positive youth development approach.

Consider

Consider going low-tech. Kids will appreciate hearing from you, and a note in the school lunch delivery or a letter in the mail may mean more to them than an email.

Choosing online activities: Consider these questions

- Are these the kinds of activities that our youth program or classroom ordinarily do?
- What will learners learn by doing this activity? Does that match up our teaching goals?
- Would the youth in my program enjoy it?
- Does it require families to buy anything? If it does, seek out activities that use only materials found in nature or in most households.
- Consider screen time: Have learners already spent the entire day looking at a screen? How will our learning experience include active learning and be different from formal education strategies?

Digital Divide:

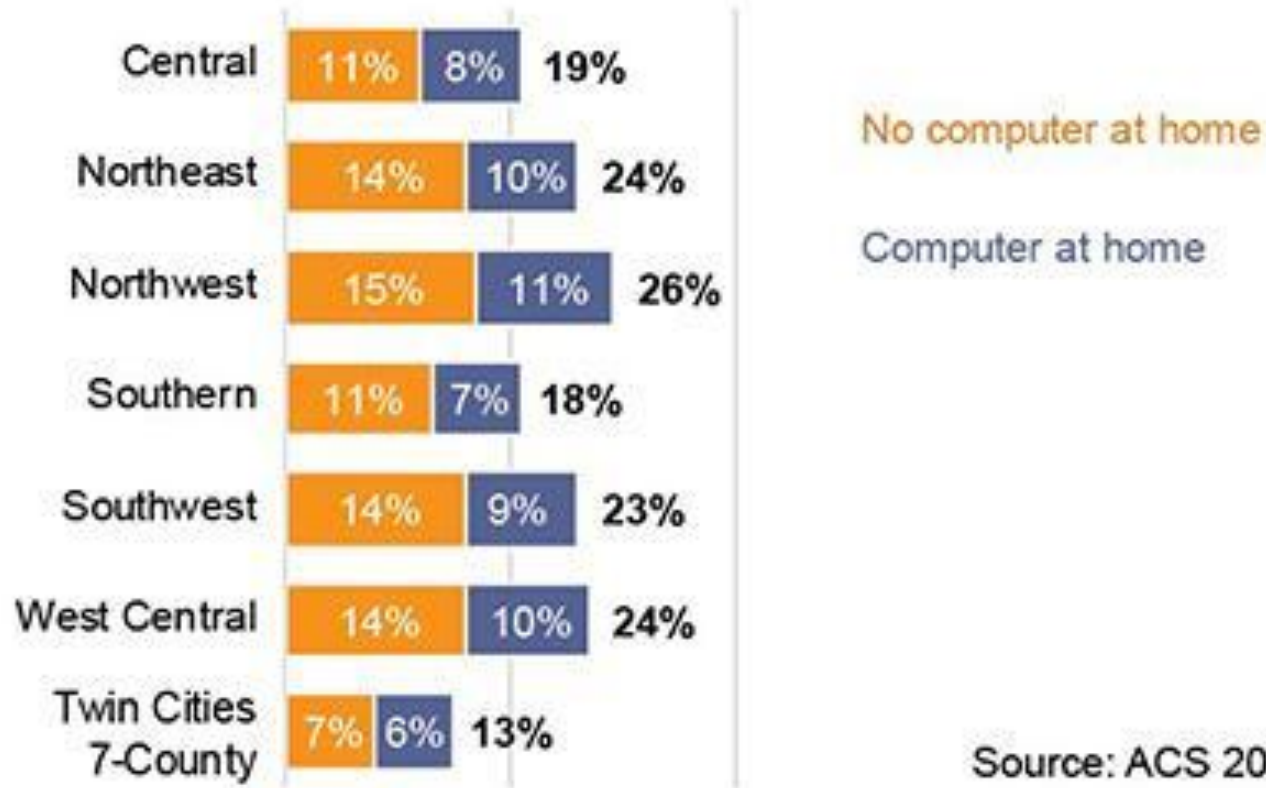
By Ed Trust-West
(Education Equity in Crisis)

A recent study found that, nationally, [around 17% of children](#) are unable to complete their homework due to limited internet access. This “digital divide” and often resulting “homework gap” mirrors trends in California, where [about 1 in 6 school-aged children](#) lack access to the internet at home.



The equity implications of these gaps and impacts on learning have been brought into sharper focus as schools and districts across the state grapple with the COVID-19 crisis. [Our parent poll revealed that 38% of low-income families and 29% of families of color](#) are concerned about access to distance learning because they don't have reliable internet at home. Parents also cited concern about access to technology – 50% of low-income and 42% of families of color lack sufficient devices at home to access distance learning.

Percent of households without internet at home



Source: ACS 2014-2018

Internet Access in MN

Minnesota Department of
Employment and Economic
Development and Connected
Nation, 2019.

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THINGS EQUITY-FOCUSED TEACHERS CAN SAY TO STUDENTS AS YOU RETURN TO SCHOOL

As school returns, we know this year presents unique challenges and changes to both educators and students. With such change, it may be especially difficult to communicate with students. While your intentions may be good, sometimes the impact of what we say can have unintended consequences. Consider some of these alternatives to have the impact you wish to have to start the year on a strong note.

| AVOID SAYING | HERE'S WHY | INSTEAD, SAY: |
|--|---|---|
| <p>"Now class, everyone please turn on your video." -Or- "[Insert student name], why don't you have on your video?"</p> | <p>Not every student is in a position where they can afford to turn on their video. Shift your focus away from pointing out which students are not on video or making video mandatory, to instead focus on making space for each student to navigate the complexities of this moment with creativity and support.</p> | <p>"Good morning, everyone! If you are able to, join the class by video. If not, feel free to participate in the lesson by chat or use the reactions button to give a thumbs up. You can also unmute yourself when you would like to share."</p> <p>Or have the class all create cool virtual backgrounds together perhaps around a class theme</p> <p>Or have students share about how they feel about having their cameras on in a survey or journal response</p> |
| <p>"With everything happening in the world, the riots and looting - I just want to check-in on everyone. Did anyone have their homes damaged?"</p> | <p>While there were agent provocateurs amongst the crowds at BLM protests nationwide, demonstrations were primarily composed of peaceful protesters. Avoid using language that puts emphasis on destruction and property damage. The conversation should focus on people, not property.</p> | <p>"This year there have been many Black Lives Matter protests across the world. I know this has impacted everyone in different ways. So I just want to check-in and see how you are doing. If you don't wish to talk about it, that's ok as well. Either way, I'm here."</p> |
| <p>"Good to see that you're all alive and well"</p> | <p>For those impacted by the virus, racial injustice, or other traumas not as readily visible, they may feel a need to "perform wellness" to meet this standard. Also, considering the profound loss of life this year, statements that put such emphasis on living and health may be triggering for students.</p> | <p>"Welcome everyone! I am excited to learn from and with each of you this year."</p> |
| <p>"I know that learning this way is not ideal. I'm not that worried about the virus, but this is what we have to do for now."</p> | <p>For those that have lost family members, friends, and acquaintances to COVID-19, any comment that diminishes the impact of the virus can be hurtful. Focus more on finding ways to shift everyone's thinking around distance learning toward excitement.</p> | <p>"I know that there are many changes to how we are learning for now, but I'm excited to try some new things with you all this year!"</p> <p>Consider trying an activity that is enhanced by -or- only possible through virtual platforms like zoom or google hangouts.</p> |

| AVOID SAYING | HERE'S WHY | INSTEAD, SAY: |
|--|---|---|
| <p>"Since you're all stuck at home, I know you have plenty of time to complete this assignment."</p> | <p>Every student's situation is different. Consider the kinds of familial, financial, and communal responsibilities a student may have that you are not aware of at this moment. Just because students are not being schooled in the same way does not mean that they are lacking in other responsibilities or demands on their time.</p> | <p>"Please submit your work by [insert due date]. If you think you will have some trouble submitting it on time, reach out to me and let me know."</p> |
| <p>"I've done all that I can, (blank) hasn't responded to any of my messages."</p> | <p>It is possible that a number of changes may have occurred over recent months. Explore community connections and alternate modes of communication to build bridges with students.</p> | <p>"Our team has the ability and the connections to get in contact with every student."</p> |
| <p>"They're all tech savvy/digital natives so this should be easy for them."</p> | <p>While we are in a digital age, it is important to recognize that not all students have access to all kinds of devices, and their familiarity to certain platforms will vary. Tailor your approach to account for diversity of experience.</p> | <p>"Students are at different places in their learning around digital tools."</p> |
| <p>"How was your summer?"</p> | <p>The summer has meant profound loss, trauma, and suffering for many. Rather than focus on resurfacing those feelings and experiences, instead focus on prompting excitement and hope for the new school year.</p> | <p>"What would make these first two weeks feel like a success for you?"</p> |
| <p>"I know last Spring was a terrible time for all of us."</p> | <p>Though the pandemic has brought about profound change and inequity, there have been some benefits for students (e.g. independent learning, personalized support). It's important to know what those benefits are to optimize them in the new school year.</p> | <p>"What worked for you last spring, if anything? What is something your teacher did last year to support you?"</p> |
| <p>"I'm giving you plenty of time to do this, no excuses."</p> | <p>Consider unseen obligations and demands on a student's plate. Shift away from a rhetoric of shame toward one of understanding.</p> | <p>"Did you understand the lesson? How can I support you in completing this? Here are some tips that I use to help manage my time now that I work from home."</p> |
| <p>"It's hard to teach [insert topic here] through zoom, but I'm doing my best."</p> | <p>Adopt a growth mindset - not just toward your students but also toward your own learning of virtual instruction strategies. Students are powerful resources for assessing what virtual practices are working well.</p> | <p>"What tips do you have for how I can improve? Time to be resilient. We're going to learn this together. I'll need you to fight through these tough moments with me."</p> |
| <p>"I don't know if that's exactly how (insert news story here) went."</p> | <p>Instead of challenging students' accounts of sociopolitical events, use the opportunity to foster a digital literacy exercise to encourage them to seek out facts for themselves.</p> | <p>"Thank you for sharing your understanding of the story, let's research this a bit more."</p> |

Using Video to Assess Student Attention in Virtual Class Meetings

| Don't Do This | Do This! |
|---|---|
| <p>✗ Connect students' video use and eye contact time to participation points, grading, or school attendance.</p> <p>✗ Remove students from the meeting if their videos are not on.</p> <p>✗ Trick students into turning on their videos (e.g., for a class dance party).</p> <p>✗ Give extra credit to students who have their video on.</p> | <p>✓ CHOICE. Let students decide whether to turn on, or keep on, their video. Allow them to use virtual or blurred backgrounds and fun filters (e.g., be a banana or potato!). https://bit.ly/virtualmtgfilters</p> <p>✓ REAL-TIME CHECK-IN. Ask questions often to assess student understanding. Allow students to respond via audio or virtual meeting tools (e.g., chat box, polls, nonverbal reactions - "thumbs up").</p> <p>✓ USE DIGITAL ASSESSMENT TOOLS. Collect different types of data to evaluate ongoing learning - Answer Garden, Gimkit, Kahoot, Google Forms, Poll Everywhere, Socrative, Crowdsignal, Formative, Classkick, Ted-Ed, Playposit, Ed Puzzle, Nearpod, etc.. https://bit.ly/formassesstech</p> |

Why Does It Matter?

PRIVACY. Students might be uncomfortable displaying their living space to their peers.

SAFETY. Students (and their family members) may not want their image captured, recorded, or shared. Students could be cyberbullied if a classmate takes a screenshot of their video.

EQUITY. Students might have unreliable Internet access, low bandwidth, devices without video capabilities, or limited access to a device.

PERSONAL. Students might feel shy or anxious to be on camera. <https://bit.ly/zoomcams>

"But I Don't Like Teaching to Blank Screens"

Teach students to setup their Google Meet or Zoom profile picture as a bitmoji, school photo, or a favorite selfie. When the camera is off, the students' profile picture will show up, giving you a virtual audience to talk to.



Ask Before Assume

This is a challenging time for everyone. If students are struggling to show attentiveness, ask questions rather than make assumptions about their actions or punish them for lack of engagement.

Provide students with

- **Power and choice!**
 - Students have little power right now. Finding ways to give students opportunities to make decisions about their own learning helps to combat that.

- **Authentic interest in the social and emotional well being!**
 - Students and adults are experiencing trauma and grief through the COVID19 pandemic. Give kids opportunities to connect with you and each other that allow them to be their full selves.

- **Other means of showing you how they learn.**
 - If a student keeps their camera off during class, what other ways can they demonstrate their learning? Provide multiple options!

Provide Virtual Brain Breaks

Have students stand, move and wiggle in front of and away from their screens.

Provide opportunities to have 'virtual recess' so that kids can just hang out and be silly together.



Supporting racial equity and people with disabilities in distant learning

https://mneep.org/toolkit/distance_learning/

MN Education Equity Partnership

<https://www.arts.gov/accessibility/accessibility-resources/resources-to-help-ensure-accessibility-for-your-virtual-events-for-people-with-disabilities>

National Endowment for the Arts

<https://www.mncompass.org/trends/insights/2019-08-27-three-questions-about-internet-access>

MN Compass

Your Distance Learning Work with Youth:

What is your school/program intentionally doing to ensure access to your virtual program?

What is your school/ program doing to be intentionally inclusive?

What is your school/ program doing to ensure an equitable virtual experience among the youth participants?

