

# Distance, Remote, and Blended Learning

You're probably hearing a lot of terms used to describe the ways that schools can operate given the mandates around limiting physical contact and carefully monitoring attendance in the building. There is no one "right way" for school systems to address these issues and implement some combination of distance, hybrid, and/or in-person schooling, but there are wrong ways. Thankfully, there are decades of research on these models of providing schooling. Of course, none of these studies occurred when entire systems were closed. But we can still draw on the evidence collected to make recommendations.

It might comfort you to know that the research tells us teaching from a distance is not necessarily more ineffective than teaching in person. It turns out that distance learning has what we call a very low "effect size." Effect sizes are ways to measure the impact or magnitude of something. It's rather like the scale we use to measure the impact of earthquakes. Some you don't feel; others are powerful. Research says that distance learning is not even a tremor. But we need to be careful when we analyze that research. In this case, a low effect size suggests that the setting isn't the deciding factor: in-person or distance learning is not better or worse. It should not be interpreted that "distance is disastrous." In fact, some students really excel when learning from a distance.

What matters then? It turns out, what we *do* matters rather than the medium. To be sure, what we witnessed in mid-2020 was not distance learning. It was pandemic teaching, crisis teaching, or "quaranteaching." Like most professions, we had to pivot and there was a steep learning curve. But we know more now. And, as the late Maya Angelou said, *Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.* And now we know better.

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To continue on effect sizes, it turns out that interactive videos are a powerful accelerator for learning. So are intelligent tutoring systems and teacher–student relationships. We could go on, but we'll save that for the second section of this book. One of the lowest effect sizes related to technology is the presence of mobile phones. Turn them off. Yes, that's our first recommendation for your child's learning. When your child is engaged in learning tasks, phones should be off and not a distraction from the learning. [As a note, some of the young people who reviewed this for us might not appreciate us telling you this, even though they agreed that their smartphones were a distraction from their learning.]

In terms of formats for distance learning, there really is no evidence about what works best. Some school districts are fully online. Others are reducing the hours students are physically present. Others have created alternating day schedules. Still others have

morning and afternoon split schedules. We have heard of schedules in which students are on campus one week and then off the next. Another variation of that proposed that students who were on campus for four days would then be off for ten to ensure that there was time to determine if anyone was exposed to COVID-19. We have also heard about pods of students staying together and then shutting down if someone is sick or exposed. And we have heard about groups of parents coming together in a neighborhood and having one person host all the children. These might all work. We don't yet know. We do know that there will be fewer minutes "live" with students and some time spent on learning tasks without the teacher present. Most states have revised their instructional minute requirements to accommodate distance learning.

We also know that you are likely to be disappointed in some of the decisions that your school system makes. You have that right and you should share your ideas and opinions with school leaders. But for the sake of your children, try to refrain from criticizing the decisions in front of them. They will pick up on your disappointment and it may just compromise the learning your child is able to do. We know that lack of confidence in the teacher is harmful to learning; the negative impact on the child when a parent believes that the teacher is ineffective is nearly off the charts.

We are concerned about equity. At this time, we all need to do what we can. School systems are focused on ensuring all students have access to technology and food. If you can afford a computer for your child, provide it. It may help stretch the school system budget so that other families can have computers. If you are able to support your child's learning during times that the class is not meeting together, please do so. That may save a little time for the teacher to spend with a child whose family is not able to do so. If you have time, please volunteer to be a tutor or mentor or classroom aide. This will allow essential workers to do their jobs with a little more peace of mind.

In sum, distance learning is not going to harm your child's education if there is a partnership between you, your child, and the teacher. Let the teacher teach. Support your child's sense of purpose in their education. Implement some of the recommendations in each of the section of this book. You may have to be more involved that you were in the past, but don't assume that you have to provide most of the instruction your child needs. And yes, things will get messy, there will be moments of frustration, and maybe even times when you or your child wants to give up. All these feelings and more are understandable, and this book will help you get through those moments so that you and your child can get their education back on track with your relationship stronger in the process.

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