

# Setting Your Scholar Up for Online Learning

# N E W S L E T T E R

**May 2020**

Schools around the world have closed their doors during the COVID-19 crisis, students from kindergarten through graduate school are being asked to learn online. It’s a change for everyone, but having the right technology in place can help with the transition.

Your student may have been using the Microsoft Office suite of software at school. If you don’t have Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint at home, check if your school is providing licenses or free software.

If not, buying a subscription to the online Microsoft 365 package allows you to pay monthly or yearly, and it’s much more affordable than in the past. One month is about the cost of two café coffees.

Otherwise, your student may be able to get work done using Google’s suite of tools. Teachers may accept links to Google Docs, Sheets, or Slides. These free options are also useful when your student needs to work on a group project. People can collaborate online in real-time using the G-Suite software.

***Teleconferencing with Teachers and Peers***

Your student is likely to need to download teleconferencing software such as Zoom or Skype. Beware! Cybercriminals take advantage of every opportunity. Noticing the increased demand for these services, they’ve set up bogus sites. Make sure that you are downloading from the legitimate sources: www.skype.com or www.zoom.us.

While we’re talking about teleconferencing, you might pass on these best practices:

* Use headphones to limit audio distractions.
* Join calls from a low-traffic setting with simple backgrounds.
* Ask others at home to avoid downloading, streaming, or backing up while the student is live online.
* Connect to the router with a network cable, or at least be as close to the wireless router as possible during the call.

***Considering Cybersecurity***

In addition to setting up fake teleconferencing sites, cybercriminals have other ways to exploit the situation.

Remind any students learning from home that they need to keep their username and password private. This is a lesson that never gets old.

Are you still using Windows 7 on a home computer? This popular operating system (OS) reached the end of its life in January 2020. Yes, it may still work, but it is no longer receiving security updates from Microsoft, and the bad guys know Windows 7 is vulnerable. Continuing to use this OS puts you at risk. Without new upgrades, you’re no longer protected from vulnerabilities or exploits.

You probably already know to avoid using public wireless networks. Although your students can’t go to a coffee shop or public library right now to get online, reminding students to secure their online activity is critical.

This is a good time to review your Wi-Fi setup. Too many homeowners don’t change the default username and password on their routers. Big mistake. You should also:

* hide your Wi-Fi network from public view;
* set your network up to encrypt transmissions;
* update router software regularly.

**You may feel isolated during the coronavirus quarantine, but you’re not alone. Our tech experts can help you set up and secure your technology for work or school from home. Give us a call today at 940-282-0290.**



# Keep in Touch While Social Distancing

Quarantine doesn’t have to mean you’re on your own all the time. Sure, back in the days of the plague or pox, people were stuck. But now, we have technology to let us remain connected even while social distancing. Here’s a roundup of top options for fun with family and friends. You can’t have an actual party at your home right now, but a virtual house party could be fun.

The **Houseparty** app (houseparty.com) allows up to eight people to connect online in a video chat “room.” There’s no need to call people (like on FaceTime) – you get a notification when friends are online. Plus, you can switch between rooms easily. It’s like wandering from the kitchen into the backyard.

**Zoom** (zoom.us) is another app that lets you have a virtual get-together. Only the host needs to have a Zoom account, and the other participants follow the link to the video conference. Free meetings are capped at 40 minutes, though, for groups of three or more.

If your friends and family are on Google, you can bring up to 150 of them together in a **Google Hangout** (hangout.google.com). Long a go-to for international calling, Skype is another video chat option.

***Social Distancing Chat***

Maybe you want to catch up but really don’t need to see each other’s faces. Perhaps you don’t want to have to get dressed!

Take texting up a notch with **Slack** (slack.com), which can keep clubs and teams together during quarantine. You can easily share files, instant message, share gifs, and also jump on a video call.

**Discord** (discordapp.com) is another app that combines text chat, voice chat, video chat, and more. A favorite already with gamers, Discord offers helpful templates to get started. People also use this app to live-stream art creation, read stories, play music together, and even host digital conventions.

**Nextdoor** (nextdoor.com) helps you connect with your neighbors. Did you see a coyote? Want to know when garbage pickup is coming this week? Hosting a virtual garage sale? This is social media specific to your ’hood – and you don’t have to go out of doors to get caught up.

***Movies with Friends***

Another way to chill together online is by enjoying a movie or binge watching a TV series.

With **Watch2Gether** (watch2gether.com) you can create a room and invite friends and family to watch YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, and SoundCloud. You could even use this app to replicate the group gym class experience. PopSugar, for instance, offers a wide range of free videos available on YouTube.

If you have a **Netflix** account and a Google Chrome browser, you can tune in together with Netflix Party (netflixparty.com). The app lets you chat back and forth while viewing. The best thing is that all party members are watching the video in sync. No one ruins that big moment by texting a response a few seconds early!

***Other Great Options***

Looking for more active virtual fun? With Rave (rave.io) you can host a virtual dance party. You can sync music videos from YouTube, Vimeo, Reddit, Google Drive, Dropbox, and Viki with friends in real-time, or create a playlist of songs, then text and video chat simultaneously. Really, there’s no excuse for being a hermit during quarantine – unless you want to be, of course!

**If you need help setting your devices up with any of these apps or the video or voice technology, our experts can help – remotely. Contact us today at 940-282-0290!**