Strategies for Establishing or Re-Establishing Social Connections Remotely

This document provides educators with a list of strategies for enhancing social connections during remote instruction.

Introduction

Given our disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students and educators did not have the chance to say good-bye or to put an official end to the year as in the past. Additionally, returning to school remotely will likely provide challenges in establishing relationships and connecting with students and parents. This brief provides several quick ideas for providing a welcoming and socially connected environment during our current normal.

Greeting at the Door Virtually

Description and Options

Building rapport with students virtually is equally or more crucial than in person. In both modalities, a positive greeting helps students to feel safe, connected, supported, and ready to learn. However, remote classrooms require creative strategies to bridge the technology gap and potential barrier. How students are greeted when they arrive to a remote learning classroom will establish the classroom culture, connectedness and engagement.

Various options could be used to greet the students to the classroom.

To greet students, the teacher could wave their hand, smile, or provide a specific verbal greeting to show the students that the teacher is happy, and excited to see them.

By setting up expectations /routines for the day, the teacher will foster a familiar classroom norm, and a sense of safety and competence.

The teacher could develop specific remote handshakes using motions paired with sounds

Music playing as students enter the room can be welcoming and engaging.

Poster greetings on the screen can build rapport with the students, and a good icebreaker to enhance connectedness.

Prior to Return to Remote Learning

- Teachers determine which greeting (s) they would like to implement.
- Have materials prepared in advance and practice prior to the first day.
- Consider video recording chosen greeting and watch a playback to increase effectiveness of delivery.

During Return to Remote Learning

The teacher will implement the remote greeting and continually evaluate effectiveness and vary the greeting based upon feedback and student connectedness.

Resources
How to Create a Community in a Virtual Classroom by Susan Yergler
This article focuses on establishing routines to support successful online learning and building a sense of belonging.

Educators Turn to Bitmoji to Build Community and Engagement by Emelina Minero
This article discusses the use of Bitmoji classrooms to help create a welcoming classroom environment.

How Do I Have a Successful Class Meeting? by Kelley McKaig
One way to build a sense of community and to maintain a routine in your virtual classroom is to hold virtual class meetings. This article unpacks the benefits of the meetings to maintain the sense of connection and safety in the virtual classroom.

Positive Acknowledgements with Remote Instruction

Description and Options

Positive acknowledgement and feedback continue to be a vital part of implementation of school-wide and classroom PBIS practices. Remote learning does not allow for an in person and a tangible acknowledgment system, but acknowledging student expected behavior will help to foster a welcoming and positive classroom climate, which support the foundation for increased engagement, rapport, academic success, and school connectedness.

Various options could be used to acknowledge students in a remote classroom.

- Utilize the B+ (Be Positive Application)

- Greet each student as they enter the remote classroom using their name.
- Provide behavior specific praise during the session. Choose five students to individually acknowledge after each session. Ether individually or in an email. Rotate students to receive acknowledgment.
- A visible acknowledgment board could be used where by the teacher could put a sticker on the board, paired with contingent verbal praise to acknowledge expected behavior.
- Emails or texts to parents or students themselves (secondary) could also be a means to provide acknowledgment. The text or email could contain a smiling photo of their child including a written note identifying the positive behavior.

Prior to Return to Remote Learning

- Provide a rationale for the use of an acknowledgment system for in person and remote learning.
- Review the current acknowledgment system and determine any adaptations.
- Develop a process for establishing a modified reward system and acknowledgement system to be used.
- Create a list of behavior specific praise.
- Create a system of documentation for those acknowledged.
- If utilizing the B+ Application, download and familiarize yourself with the application.

During Return to Remote Learning

Implement a positive acknowledgement system and continually evaluate effectiveness of implementation and documentation.

Resources

Positive Reinforcement for Online Classrooms by Laura Mooimam
The focus of this article is on the importance of building relationships and positive regard in the classroom through the use of frequent positive feedback.

The B+ (Be Positive App) for Distance Instruction
This document provides a description of the Be + (Be Positive) mobile application released by the National Center on PBIS along with some suggestions for how educators can use the app for distance instruction.

Classroom PBIS for Online Learning
This document outlines ways that teachers may adapt Classroom PBIS strategies to fit an online learning format.

Family Connections During Remote Instruction

Description and Options

Families will have concerns/anxiety about their child's academic instruction, remote learning engagement, social interaction, connecting and establishing rapport with the teachers, and classroom climate. Connections and communication with parents will cultivate a more welcoming environment for families, which will strengthen the student remote experience, as well as student academic and social success,

Consistent, informative, and supportive school wide and teacher communication with families via emails, phone calls, virtual newsletter (school wide and classroom) and social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook will help foster parent/ family connectiveness.

Topics for communication could include: updated behavioral matrix, acknowledgment system, procedures and guidelines, resources, technology support, and recommendations to stay connected.

Prior to Return to Remote Learning

The School Leadership Team should:

- Review the current protocol and process for communicating with families
- Communicate and share with staff to determine any updates that need to be included school-wide and class-wide
- Determine if any resources or training are needed for staff related to technology aspects of the communication plan
- If using social media to communicate with families, ensure appropriate documentation is in place to share information and photos

During Return to Remote Learning.

Implement your updated communication process with families and consider surveying families to get feedback on the communication given the current normal.

Resources

A Strategy for Building Productive Relationships with Parents by Crystal Frommert
This brief article discusses the benefits of reaching out to families early in the school year with positive messages as a means for building successful partnerships with families.

[Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement in the Time of COVID-19 and Remote Learning, and Always](#) from the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

[Connecting with Families](#) from the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations

Behavior Matrix During Remote Instruction

Description and Options

With instruction that is delivered remotely, it is equally important to define, teach, and practice the behaviors that the teacher strives to reinforce.

Considerations for remote behavior matrices include the following:

- Keeping your current classroom behavior expectations
- Modifying the behavioral expectations to include remote activities as locations on the classroom matrix.
- Re-examining physical routines based on remote learning needs.
- Adding behaviors specific to online learning that need to identified, taught and acknowledged.

Prior to the Return to Remote Learning

- Review current school wide routines and expectations
- Review current classroom routines and expectations
- Review behavioral matrix and update to accommodate in person or remote considerations.
- Consider any resources or materials to implement the modified behavior matrix.
- Be prepared to identify, define, teacher and practice expectations.
- Consider any new resources needed.

During the Return to Remote Learning

- Teach the behavioral matrix the first week and month of school, as well as throughout the year.
- Be prepared to provide feedback and acknowledgment.
- Monitor effectiveness and review considerations as data indicates.

Resources

[Creating a PBIS Behavioral Teaching Matrix for Remote Instruction](#)
In this brief from the National Center on PBIS, educators are provided with guidance on how to develop a behavior matrix for remote instruction and can review examples.

URLs Used in Document

How to Create a Community in a Virtual Classroom
(https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-create-community-virtual-classroom)

Educators Turn to Bitmoji to Build Community and Engagement
(https://www.edutopia.org/article/educators-turn-bitmoji-build-community-and-engagement)

How Do I Have a Successful Class Meeting?
(https://helpcenter.newtechnetwork.org/hc/en-us/articles/360041041672-How-do-I-have-a-successful-virtual-class-meeting-)

Positive Reinforcement for Online Classrooms
(https://www.lauramooiman.com/post/positive-reinforcement-for-online-classrooms-increase-connection-improve-behavior-and-have-fun)

The B+ (Be Positive App) for Distance Instruction
(https://mimtsstac.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Covid/Educators/Using_the_Be_Positive_App_for_Distance_Learning.pdf)

Classroom PBIS for Online Learning
(https://www.dropbox.com/s/wlge34cse6d9xmn/Classroom_PBIS_for_Online_Learning.docx?dl=0)

A Strategy for Building Productive Relationships with Parents
(https://www.edutopia.org/article/strategy-building-productive-relationships-parents)

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Family Engagement in the Time of COVID-19 and Remote Learning, and Always
(https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc5da7c3560c36b7dab1922/t/5e84aac1e21ae556868a53a8/1585752769220/Culturally+responsive+family+engagement+.pdf)

Connecting with Families
(https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/Connecting-with-Families_tipsheet.pdf)

Creating a PBIS Behavioral Teaching Matrix for Remote Instruction
(https://assets-global.website-files.com/5d3725188825e071f1670246/5e7e5a79378fc458723ddf4f_Creating%20a%20PBIS%20Behavior%20Teaching%20Matrix%20for%20Remote%20Instruction.pdf)

Michigan's MTSS Technical Assistance Center