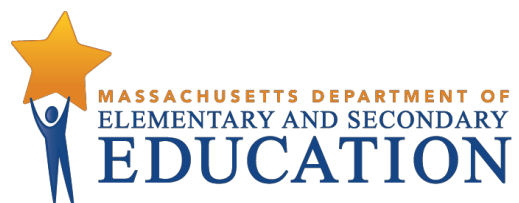




## Remote Learning Guidance for Fall 2020

**Jeffrey C. Riley**  
**Commissioner**

July 24, 2020



## Introduction

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) [Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance](#) (*download*) outlines requirements and considerations for fall reopening plans with the **goal of safely returning as many students as possible to in-person school settings to maximize learning and address students' holistic needs**. The Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance requires districts and schools to prepare a plan that includes three learning models: in-person learning with safety requirements, a hybrid model of in-person and remote learning, and a plan for full-time remote learning. Remote learning will be necessary for students who will not be attending school in-person, as part of a hybrid learning model, and in case changing COVID-19 conditions require a shift to full remote learning as determined by local and state leaders. The following guidance provides additional detail on remote learning expectations, program models districts may consider, and considerations for implementing various models.

### In this document, you will find:

- **Important information about policy requirements and related guidance for remote learning** this fall,
- Criteria for meeting **foundational technology needs**, and
- Conditions and considerations for **selecting an appropriate remote learning option for your school or district**.

For more information or assistance, please contact Jackie Gantzer, director of remote learning, at [jacquelyn.m.gantzer@mass.gov](mailto:jacquelyn.m.gantzer@mass.gov) or 781-338-3519.

While this document will outline important differences in our expectations for remote learning this fall as compared to spring 2020, remote learning plans should continue to adhere to the guiding principles in the April 2020 [“Strengthening the Remote Learning Experience”](#) (*download*) guidance:

- **The safety and well-being of students, families, and staff has been and must continue to be our top priority as an educational community.** We are focused not only on physical health, safety, and nutrition, but also on [social-emotional](#) and mental health needs.
- This crisis disproportionately affects our most vulnerable students in terms of their physical and mental health and academically. **Equity needs to be a top consideration in local planning efforts.** To support these efforts, DESE has issued guidance on how best to support special populations, including [students with disabilities](#) (*download*) and [English learners](#).
- **Maintaining connections between school staff, students, and families is paramount, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our school communities.** These connections will help guide districts and schools in addressing students' specific needs.

In addition, **we as an education community must commit to a growth mindset in order to effectively navigate these unprecedented times.** Everyone – leaders, educators, students, and families – is managing competing priorities, navigating new experiences, learning new skills, and dealing with the uncertainty of an ongoing health pandemic. We must make the best decisions we can with the information we have, implement those decisions to the best of our ability, continuously gather feedback on what is or is not working, and adjust.

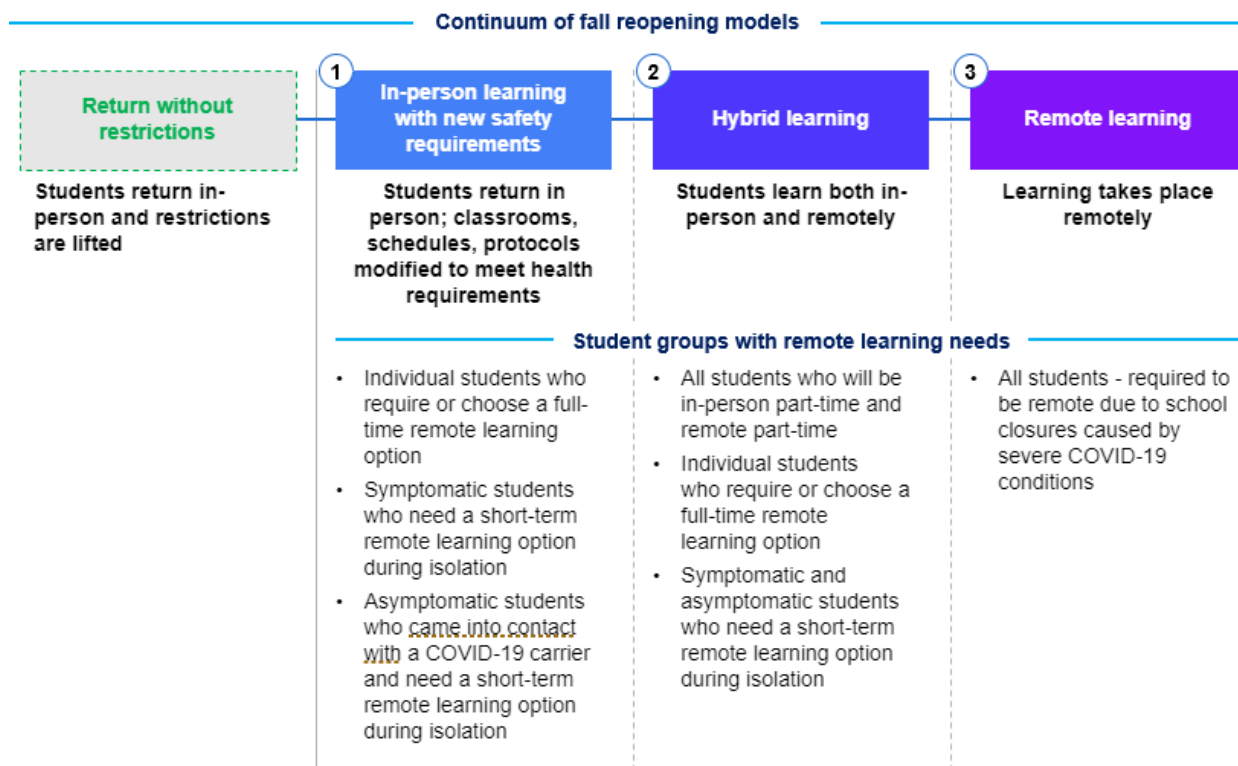
In particular, we **emphasize a commitment to equity during this challenging time**. The coronavirus has disproportionately impacted vulnerable students and their families, and we must continue to take action to ensure that **all** students, including our highest-need students have the access, resources, and high-quality instruction they deserve.

## One plan with three learning models

Given the variety of student, family, teacher, and staff needs, as well as the potential for changing health circumstances, we are requiring districts and schools to prepare a reopening plan that includes the three learning models: in-person learning with new safety requirements, a hybrid of in-person and remote learning, and a comprehensive fully-remote learning program.

**Regardless of the pandemic’s status this fall, planning for remote learning is necessary to ensure preparedness for changing circumstances and to address the needs of students impacted by each scenario** (Exhibit 1, below).

*Exhibit 1*



To support districts in creating and implementing remote learning plans, DESE is partnering with LearnLaunch for the 2020-21 school year. This partnership will provide workshops, coaching, and resources for Massachusetts district and school leaders – free of charge – on the [Building Blocks of Equitable Remote Learning](#) framework. Districts interested in accessing this resource can visit the [LearnLaunch website](#) for more information or reach out directly to Jackie Gantzer (contact information above).

## Requirements and related guidance for remote learning this fall

On June 30, 2020, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted, on an emergency basis, amendments to the student learning time regulations, 603 CMR 27.00. In particular, the amendments include 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), which requires all remote learning models to meet the following standards:

- Procedures for all students to participate in remote learning, including a system for tracking attendance and participation;
- Remote academic work is aligned to state standards; and
- A policy for issuing grades for students' remote academic work.
- Teachers and administrators shall regularly communicate with students' parents and guardians, including providing interpretation and translation services to limited English proficient parents and guardians.

### Structured Learning Time

Remote learning this spring took place during school closures ordered by the Governor, and districts were not required to fully meet the student learning time requirements. **This will change for the fall. Districts will be required to meet the structured learning time requirements, whether they are providing instruction in-person, remotely, or in a hybrid model.**

**While these requirements may be modified in the future, at this time, regardless of the learning model (in-person, hybrid, or remote), the minimum school year is 180 days, and students must receive a minimum of 900 and 990 hours of structured learning time for elementary and secondary students, respectively.**

Remote learning constitutes structured learning time so long as a district's remote learning model is consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b) outlined above. Structured learning time is defined in the regulations as "time during which students are engaged in regularly scheduled instruction, learning activities, or learning assessments within the curriculum for study of the 'core subjects' and 'other subjects.'" In addition to classroom time where both teachers and students are present, structured learning time may include directed study, independent study, technology-assisted learning, presentations by persons other than teachers, school-to-work programs, and statewide student performance assessments." **All the activities listed in this definition may be incorporated in or adapted to hybrid and remote learning programs, and we encourage districts to incorporate learning time activities that are both computer-based and non-computer-based.**

As with in-person programming, some activities that may occur during the school day, while organized by a teacher or school staff member, do not constitute structured learning time. Unless directly incorporated into standards-based instructional time, the following activities do not meet the criteria described above and do not count toward meeting the minimum structured learning time requirement: recess, social or informal check-ins, non-instructional games, unstructured study periods, and participating in optional school programming (such as social clubs).

### **Prioritizing Students for In-Person Learning**

In cases where districts cannot bring all students back in-person and are implementing either a predominantly hybrid or remote model, they may choose to identify groups of students to attend school in-person full-time – so long as the district is able to effectively follow health and safety requirements. Some students have a particularly high need for in-person instruction in order to progress adequately in their learning. **For this reason, we encourage districts to prioritize the following student groups for full-time in-person instruction:**

1. Students with disabilities and English learners, particularly those with more intensive needs;
2. Students whose parents/caregivers report that they do not have access to reliable internet or a suitable learning space at home (particularly students experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity and students in foster care or congregate care);
3. Students who are significantly behind academically;
4. Students who were disengaged and/or who struggled significantly during previous remote learning periods; and
5. Early learners (grades PK-5).

In cases where the student populations listed above comprise too large a group to safely return all of the prioritized students in person, we strongly encourage districts to prioritize students in the first two groups for in-person instruction.

Even if a student is prioritized for in-person learning, **parents/caregivers have the option to choose a district’s remote learning program for their child’s instruction if they prefer – with the understanding that the remote learning program may not provide as robust offerings as, or replace the full benefits of, learning in person.** At no point should schools or districts “counsel” students into a particular program due to behavior challenges.

### **Enrollment**

Schools and districts should continue to report the enrollment status of all students via SIMS (Student Information Management System) in accordance with [normal procedures](#), including those attending in person and remotely.

Many superintendents have surveyed parents/caregivers about their intention to have their children return to school. We recommend that districts and parents/caregivers continue to be in close communication so that schools can plan for staffing and programming thoughtfully. If a district is able to provide in-person programming and a student is physically able to attend, at this time, DESE recommends starting with in-person learning. However, **parents/caregivers who do not want their child(ren) to return in person may choose a district’s remote learning program.**

In addition, parents/caregivers should keep students home from school if they are sick or have had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19, and districts and schools are required to provide a learning program to students in all of these scenarios, though specific remote learning programming will depend on individual districts and schools.

There may be circumstances in which, after deciding that their children should start the school year learning remotely, parents decide they would like their children to attend school in person. However, there will likely be health and safety considerations that require planning (such as maintaining appropriate distancing in the classroom), and as such, parents/caregivers should anticipate a reasonable waiting period before students are able to change from remote to in-person learning. **If necessary to comply with health and safety requirements, districts may establish a policy that sets a reasonable transition period, ideally no more than three to four weeks, to plan for the transition of a student from remote to in-person learning.** During this time period, teaching and learning must continue uninterrupted for that student.

### **Attendance**

**Schools and districts must take daily attendance whether a student is in person or remote.** Consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), districts must have a daily attendance policy and system for remote learning that can be reported into SIMS. Schools may employ multiple ways to track attendance (e.g., monitor whether students are present in synchronous sessions, submitting assignments online, logging onto online learning platforms, attending virtual check-ins, etc.) depending on the structure of the remote learning program. It is critical that districts clearly communicate this policy to students, families, and staff to ensure attendance reporting accuracy.

**During the 2020-21 school year, DESE will also require schools and districts to differentiate between students attending school in-person and remotely in their local Student Information System.** This data will allow DESE to monitor remote learning programming and student engagement across the Commonwealth. The Department will release information soon with directions for districts to report this information.

**Parents/caregivers are responsible for ensuring their child attends school every day, whether for in-person or remote learning. Schools and districts must continue to investigate extended absences and make and document reasonable efforts to locate the student and determine the reason for nonattendance.** In addition to attendance officers, schools may identify staff members who are unable to return to school in person who could support more robust efforts to follow-up with absent students. Districts and schools are especially encouraged during this time to work directly with families to identify barriers to student attendance and to support families in alleviating these challenges. Specifically, we encourage districts to create formal support plans for students and families experiencing challenges. Additional guidance, information, and resources for communicating with and engaging students and families can be found on DESE's [Social and Emotional Learning](#) page.

### **Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning**

Districts may determine the amount of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning during remote learning programming. However, consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), DESE requires that **remote learning programs include regular, two-way communication between students, educators, and families to ensure students and families have meaningful opportunities to connect regularly with staff.** Students must have regular, consistent opportunities to access live, synchronous instruction, student-to-student interaction, collaborative assignments/projects, teacher feedback, and other needed supports (e.g., semi-weekly office hours, individual check-ins with students bi-weekly, etc.), as they are critical for student academic growth and meaningful student and family engagement.



## **Grades**

Consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), **districts must assess all students based on the district’s and educator’s performance criteria for students during the 2020-21 academic year.** This performance criteria must be consistent across in-person, hybrid, and remote learning environments. For example, if students typically receive a letter grade (A-F) for a particular course, students who are participating remotely must also receive a letter grade. Although a district’s grading policy will be implemented across all scenarios, districts should consider exemptions for students under extreme circumstances (e.g., students in households with family members experiencing significant health issues related to COVID-19) and ensure they receive the appropriate support and wraparound services to accelerate learning.

## **Learning Standards**

Consistent with 603 CMR 27.08(3)(b), **all students – whether learning in-person or remotely – must have access to grade-level instruction in all content areas included in the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.** While the scope and sequence of the instruction teachers provide will vary depending on student needs and district requirements, all students will be required to take the MCAS tests in spring 2021. Students learning remotely should also have opportunities to engage in enrichment opportunities and receive intervention supports as needed.

## **Special Education in Remote Settings**

**All schools and districts are required to have a [comprehensive plan](#) (download) for delivering special education instruction and services remotely.** A remote model must be available for individual students who are not returning in person, as well as for students attending in person in the event of future classroom or school closures due to COVID-19.

During the spring of 2020, DESE described two models of service delivery that could be used to satisfy the requirement to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities:

- **Resources and Supports:** (e.g., sending packets and assignments home coupled with frequent communication with parents) and
- **Instruction and Services:** (e.g., structured learning time, teletherapy, and video conferencing).

**With the ability to plan for the possibility of remote service delivery during the 2020-21 school year, schools and districts must be prepared to provide services through the “Instruction and Services” mode of delivery.** The “Resources and Supports” delivery model can only be used on a temporary basis for a limited period of time (no more than two weeks), until the school or district has overcome any hurdles that prevented service delivery through an “Instruction and Services” model.

For school year 2020-21, Instruction and Services must include the following components:

- A regular and consistent schedule of classes, interventions, services, and therapies as required by the student’s IEP, offered synchronously or asynchronously;
- Structured learning time designed so that the student can access state standards; and
- Frequent interactions with teachers and other staff members to ensure participation.

The consistent schedule of classes, interventions, services, and therapies must include time students spend interacting directly with teachers and related service providers on a regular basis, as well as some independent work time, as appropriate, and opportunities for interacting with classmates. Synchronous remote lessons or tele-therapy sessions can be provided via telephone or video conferencing. Students might also benefit from asynchronous pre-recorded videos of lessons to follow at home. For students receiving the majority of their daily instruction through special education, teachers and therapists should assign supplemental work (beyond lessons taught synchronously or asynchronously) during the school day that can be accomplished independently with guidance from and accountability to the teacher or therapist.

### **English as Second Language (ESL) in Remote Settings**

Districts and schools must continue to meet their legal obligation to serve English learners, even when students are learning remotely. **All schools and districts must have a comprehensive plan for delivering English Learner Education (ELE) services remotely**, and this model must be available for individual students who are not returning in person and for all students in the event of future classroom or school closures due to COVID-19. Districts can find additional recommendations and resources in [DESE's Guidance on Remote Learning for English Learners](#).

To improve English learners' educational opportunities, educators and families should work as partners. Without opportunities to interact in person, it is even more important to build and maintain strong relationships. The Department provided additional [guidelines](#) with tools and resources for students who are English learners and for the educators and families who are supporting their learning.

## **Foundational technology needs for remote learning**

In order to prepare for the full range of possible learning environments during the 2020-21 school year, districts must ensure that every student has adequate access to technology to engage in remote learning. Further, districts should confirm that staff members have what they need to effectively teach while they are remote and/or to reach students who are learning remotely. To support these efforts, districts should include the following in remote learning plans:

### **Access and connectivity for every student and educator**

**Districts should ensure that every individual student and educator has access to an appropriate device (such as a laptop, Chromebook, or tablet) and adequate internet (such as through household broadband or a wireless hotspot) to use for remote learning.** Districts are encouraged to use multiple funding sources to ensure full access to technology in the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. Districts should consider allocating funding from the following [grants](#) made available to cities, towns, and districts:

- \$25 million from the Remote Learning Technology Essentials grants, which will be distributed to districts to help close gaps in student access to devices and the internet;
- \$193.8 million from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, issued to districts largely based on the Title I formula;
- A portion of the \$502 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CvRF) already allocated to cities and towns, of which a meaningful amount of submitted costs are related to education; and
- \$182 million from the CvRF School Reopening grants, through which districts will receive \$225 per pupil to support school reopening.



### **Uniform digital learning platforms**

According to DESE's spring technology survey, the majority of Massachusetts districts currently have some form of a learning management system (LMS), though some may need to add supplemental platforms and programs to support full delivery of remote instruction. For the 2020-21 school year, districts should work closely with educators, students, and families to select and implement technology platforms and promote safe and effective use throughout the year. We expect districts to include the types of technology platforms listed below or their equivalent as part of their remote learning plan.<sup>1</sup>

- **Learning Management System (LMS) platform** (*for schools without an LMS*): Select and license an LMS platform that will enable self-directed study and allow teachers to assign and receive work, track progress, and provide targeted feedback and support. (Google Classroom, Canvas, and Schoology are three of the most widely learning management system platforms used in Massachusetts districts).
- **Collaboration tools:** Identify and select common collaboration tools for staff and students and purchase enterprise licenses if selected technologies are not open-use. Ensure all stakeholders are using compatible software for activities such as:
  - Face-to-face communication (e.g. Google Meet, Skype, Zoom)
  - Instant messaging (e.g. Slack, Skype)
  - Document collaboration (e.g. Google Documents, Microsoft Office 365)
  - File-sharing (e.g. Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, Office 365)
  - Calendar-sharing (e.g. Google Calendar, iCalendar, Microsoft Outlook)
- **Content platform(s):** For asynchronous and supplemental learning materials, identify common content platforms (such as Khan Academy) that educators use for direct and/or supplemental instruction (e.g. readings, videos, tutorials, and games) and that can be integrated with the district learning management system.
- **Single-sign on platform:** Incorporate a platform that provides a single-sign on access point for students and families to make accessing remote learning as simple as possible. Common platforms used in Massachusetts include Clever and ClassLink.

### **Training and support for students, families, and staff members**

Districts should set expectations for account setup and user testing on new platforms, disseminate user guides and online resources, and offer technical support resources and training, if needed. Districts and schools should provide streamlined, consistent communication and support to enable all students, parents/caregivers, and/or educators to do the following:

- Log on to their device and use technology tools and platforms safely and effectively
- Access ongoing technology support (both for hardware and network issues)
- Access curriculum and content
- Assign and/or complete and submit assignments and receive feedback
- Monitor course progress and student performance (such as grades and assessment results)
- Engage with their teacher(s) for instruction and interact with other students
- Access services and accommodations for students with disabilities
- Access services for English learners

### **School and district technology systems**

Each district and school should name a technology lead to create, implement, and monitor technology systems throughout the year. We recommend that each technology lead, in collaboration with other school staff members and stakeholders, manage the following systems:

- **Device management:** Monitor inventory, distribution, and maintenance
- **Security compliance:** Ensure all technology platforms and tools comply with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Districts are strongly encouraged to join the [Student Data Privacy Alliance](#) for additional resources and ongoing support.
- **Technology support:** Identify and/or provide ongoing technical support for educators, students, and parents/caregivers. Districts are encouraged to join the [Massachusetts Technology Directors Listserv](#) to collaborate with other technology leads across the Commonwealth.
- **Progress monitoring:** Develop mechanisms to collect and integrate feedback on the learning platforms (e.g. administer a regular survey, hold focus groups), and facilitate sharing of best practices across staff (e.g. start a living document of tips and tricks, hold peer tech support sessions).

## **Options for remote learning programs**

In this section, we outline several remote learning options that are available to districts and schools this fall. When determining which option(s) to pursue, districts should consider the following conditions to identify the option(s) that best align with the district’s resources and needs:

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** How does the remote learning model fit within the district’s broader plan for 2020-21 (including in-person and/or hybrid plans)? How many students will need access to a full-time remote program?
- **Planning and implementation:** How will the district secure enough resources and capacity to plan and implement the necessary remote learning program?
- **Staffing:** How many staff members are available to teach remotely? How prepared are they to teach in a remote setting? What kind of support do they need?
- **Curriculum and instructional materials:** Does the district have high-quality, adaptable instructional materials that can be used in a remote setting?
- **Options and cost/benefits analysis:** What are the options within and between remote learning programs, and what are the costs and benefits?

The following pages include charts that summarize five options for remote learning programs, which districts might benefit most from each, and what some of the high-level benefits and challenges are for each. These models are not mutually exclusive, and different models may be used for different groups of students to meet varying needs. **In every model, districts and schools are ultimately responsible for the overall student learning experience so that all students are appropriately engaged, making academic progress, and have the resources and support they need throughout the year.**

## Option 1: Operate a fully district-designed and district-run remote program.

Districts may build upon systems and experiences from the spring to operate a full-time remote program for students. Districts would need to provide all technology (including a learning management system and content platforms), technology support, instructional and operational staffing, curriculum, and related professional development. District teachers and staff would be responsible for delivering instruction aligned to state standards, providing feedback (including grades) to students, monitoring attendance and engagement, communicating with students and families, etc. This option, while requiring a significant investment of district resources and capacity, may provide strong alignment between students attending school remotely, in person, and in hybrid settings. If districts are considering building a remote/virtual program that can be sustained in future years and beyond COVID-19-related needs, they may consider applying to develop and operate a District Virtual School. The Department’s [guidance for District Virtual Schools](#) provides helpful information and resources for districts seeking to implement this option for both the short- and long-term.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Program should be designed to fully align to current academic programs and remote learning needs in a way that allows for seamless transitions between in-person, hybrid, and remote settings.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires full school-based staffing models to run all areas of the program, and staff members will need to be trained on all areas of effective remote/virtual instruction.
- **Cost:** Dependent on existing district infrastructure and details of local remote program, though generally there are “start-up” costs for areas like technology and training that, once fully operational, more closely compares to in-person costs per student.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts with sufficient staffing available to deliver remote instruction for all grade levels and content areas needed</li> <li>• Districts with high-quality, adaptable curriculum and strong technology infrastructure</li> <li>• Districts that experienced fewer challenges adapting to remote learning in the spring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully aligned to district academic program (learning priorities, curriculum, scope and sequence, etc.)</li> <li>• Lends itself to moving between in-person, hybrid, and remote more seamlessly</li> <li>• May be used in subsequent years regardless of the status of the virus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires significant capacity in terms of planning, staffing, and implementing</li> </ul>

**Option 2: Adopt and implement a high-quality curriculum that easily spans in-person and remote settings.**

Adopting high-quality curriculum and instructional materials can be a powerful way to accelerate student learning. Given the various learning environments districts are planning for, this may also be an opportunity for districts to select curricular materials that are designed to be used across in-person, hybrid, and remote settings. The Department recently applied to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for grant funding to procure high-quality, comprehensive instructional materials that would be made available to districts. Instructional materials would be available for grades K-8 in ELA and math, designed for teaching in-person or remotely, and would be paired with training and coaching. The U.S. Department of Education expects to notify DESE in late-July whether or not funding is available for this option.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Students should access the same high-quality content and instruction regardless of whether they are using a remote, in-person, or hybrid model.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires full school-based staffing models to run all areas of the program. Staff members are recommended to participate in training to adopt and effectively implement the new instructional materials.
- **Cost:** Funding will vary based on curriculum options; DESE may provide funding to support these costs.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts with sufficient staffing available to deliver remote instruction for all grade levels and content areas needed</li> <li>• Districts with strong technology infrastructure</li> <li>• Districts with an appetite to adopt and train on a new set of instructional materials</li> <li>• Districts anticipating many students moving between in-person, hybrid, and/or remote programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials that can be adapted to use for in-person, hybrid, and remote settings</li> <li>• Educators receive professional development on instructional delivery in remote, hybrid, and in-person settings</li> <li>• Creates a coherent learning program for all students, with certain curricula providing demonstrated gains for students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires significant staff capacity to adopt a new set of instructional materials and to dedicate time for training</li> <li>• Additional costs associated with purchasing and implementing a new curriculum</li> </ul>

**Option 3: Combine pre-existing instructional materials with online virtual teaching materials.**

The Department will curate recommendations for virtual content/instructional materials that educators can use for direct and supplemental remote instruction. The Department will provide a sample schedule for elementary, middle school, and high school students that includes recommended virtual content available for core subject areas. Districts and schools can select and incorporate the virtual content that builds on their current curriculum and instructional materials and that meets their specific needs.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Content should be tailored to the specific needs of the district’s plan – as primary content for remote learning only or to supplement remote, hybrid, and/or in-person instruction.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires district educators to plan and deliver all remote instruction. Relieves some instructor planning and instructional time by providing vetted content resources, though educators would still need to assign individual activities and lessons to students based on district scope and sequence and student need.
- **Cost:** May require optional licenses for specific high-quality content and platforms (cost varies by source).

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts with sufficient staffing available to deliver remote instruction for all grade levels and content areas needed and educators who are able to navigate technology platforms fairly well</li> <li>• Districts that would benefit from supplementing remote learning plans with vetted virtual content</li> <li>• Districts with a small percentage of students needing or choosing full-time remote instruction and/or districts leaning towards a predominantly hybrid model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators have the ability to supplement instruction with vetted content as needed</li> <li>• Educators can spend more time planning for and providing individual student support instead of planning and delivering all instructional content</li> <li>• Can be designed to be coherent with in-person and hybrid models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires capacity for schools/ educators to select and assign appropriate content and navigate multiple content platforms</li> </ul>

#### Option 4: Purchase courses through Commonwealth Virtual Schools (CMVS).

Commonwealth Virtual Schools (CMVS) can provide individual courses or a full bundle of courses to schools or districts through an agreement that allows the student to remain enrolled in their home district. These courses must meet the district’s or school’s standards and requirements. The CMVS provides the teacher, the learning management system/curriculum platform, the courses, synchronous or asynchronous content, assignments, and assessments. Districts would assign educators and/or other staff members to monitor student progress and provide additional supports.

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Serves best as a stand-alone program for a small percentage of students who require remote-only programming. Does not lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and/or remote settings.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires assigning teachers/staff to monitor and facilitate student progress, but no direct instruction for core content.
- **Cost:** Around \$350-\$575 per student per semester-long course. Districts may also purchase course “bundles” for students to cover all required courses for a semester or a full year.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts with staffing concerns (number available and prepared for remote instruction)</li> <li>• Districts that experienced many challenges with remote learning in the spring</li> <li>• Districts with a small percentage of students needing or choosing full-time remote instruction</li> <li>• Districts with specific gaps in remote instructional offerings that individual courses could fill effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students access a single or full suite of grade-level, semester-long courses that include a learning management system, content, and synchronous and asynchronous instruction with a Massachusetts-certified teacher</li> <li>• Can fill gaps in courses/subjects, particularly in the secondary grades</li> <li>• Requires minimal district planning and staffing resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires an additional cost per student</li> <li>• Curriculum may not be aligned with district’s existing curriculum; doesn’t lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and remote learning throughout the semester</li> <li>• Districts would need a separate plan if all students went remote</li> <li>• Districts will have to establish a purchasing agreement with one of two CMVS; limited spaces available</li> </ul>



**Option 5: Purchase student licenses for a Learning Management System (LMS) with full course content included.**

While districts may purchase licenses from a virtual course and content provider at any time, DESE is exploring partnerships with vendors that could provide a stand-alone, self-paced LMS populated with full K-12 content that can be used by students to cover the basic curriculum standards on a largely asynchronous basis. While this platform would not depend on frequent synchronous live teaching, it would require assigned and targeted educator check-in/coaching support from the district/school and would benefit from added synchronous instructional opportunities. The LMS partner sought by DESE would provide all technical support for districts and families that opt-in. The LMS partner would also provide professional development to districts on how to deploy the system (potentially embedded as part of the per-pupil buy-in cost).

- **Alignment to district-wide plan:** Serves best as a stand-alone program for a small or large percentage of students who are interested in a remote learning option for a longer period of time. Does not lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and/or remote settings unless the district decides to adopt the LMS-provided curriculum for all students.
- **Staffing needs:** Requires assigning teachers/staff (e.g. educators who must work remotely) to monitor and facilitate student progress, provide additional support, and possibly to provide tutoring or other live, synchronous opportunities.
- **Cost:** Initial research shows it could range from \$200-\$400 annually per student for access to a full suite of courses.

Likely Best For	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts with staffing concerns (concerned about the number of staff available and prepared for remote instruction)</li> <li>• Districts with limited technology and system infrastructure to create and oversee a fully remote program</li> <li>• Districts with individual students/families who are interested in a fully remote option for a longer period of time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students access a full suite of courses that include an LMS and instructional content that is largely self-directed and asynchronous.</li> <li>• Supplements district staffing with additional resources</li> <li>• Allows for easier collaboration and sharing of resources across school and district boundaries (e.g., grouping students at the same grade level and/or sharing teachers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires an additional cost per student</li> <li>• Depending on the number and configuration of participating students, the district may need to creatively assign educators to student groups, such as assigning an educator to support multiple grade levels and/or students across multiple schools.</li> <li>• Curriculum is not aligned with district curriculum and doesn't easily lend itself to students moving between in-person, hybrid, and remote throughout the year (unless the district adopts the LMS curriculum for all students).</li> </ul>

## Next steps for planning and implementation

As districts identify how they will deliver remote learning for the 2020-21 school year, they will need to work closely with students, families, and educators to ensure their implementation plan takes into consideration the needs of all participating students.

LearnLaunch has provided a [framework](#) to help districts plan and implement comprehensive remote learning plans, regardless of the specific model adopted. Below is a set of planning considerations and next steps aligned to this framework. Districts should visit the LearnLaunch [website](#) for helpful tools and information about upcoming workshops, or reach out to Jackie Gantzer, director of remote learning, at [jacquelyn.m.gantzer@mass.gov](mailto:jacquelyn.m.gantzer@mass.gov) or 781-338-3519.

### **1. Prepare for the 2020-21 school year**

#### **Set Priorities for Learning**

- Determine the academic vision for the 2020-21 school year and how it will be implemented in remote learning settings.
- Plan learning experiences, including content, instruction, and progress monitoring.

#### **Select Aligned Tools**

- Ensure all curriculum and instructional materials are high quality and integrated with the district Student Information Systems and other technology platforms, where possible.
- See the “Uniform Digital Learning Platforms” section above for additional detail.

#### **Ensure Equitable Access**

- See the “Foundational Technology Needs” section above for additional detail on technology requirements.
- Ensure students, staff, and families know how to effectively access and use all content and technology platforms selected.
- Assist participating families in getting the resources they need to effectively support and monitor student learning

### **2. Onboard staff, students, and families**

#### **Communicate Clearly**

- Create weekly consolidated communications to students and parents/caregivers, including meeting times and assignment checklists.
- Establish regular two-way communication with students, staff, and families to monitor program effectiveness and adjust support strategies where needed.
- Develop communication plans and strategies that are culturally responsive and accessible, including providing translation services.

#### **Prepare Educators**

- Work closely with educators to collectively plan and problem-solve and to understand their experiences and challenges.
- Assign teachers/staff to provide necessary instructional and support roles.
- Provide job-embedded professional development for specific staffing assignments.

## **Support Parents**

- Create opportunities to regularly communicate with parents/caregivers in ways that are accessible and culturally responsive. These opportunities should give staff an opportunity to understand parents'/caregivers' experiences and challenges.
- Connect parents/caregivers to technical support and resources related to student learning.
- Provide explicit expectations for parent/caregiver responsibilities and offer ongoing resources and support for implementing and monitoring student learning at home.

## **3. Ensure program delivery is inclusive and holistic**

### **Include Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

- Prioritize building relationships and a sense of community.
- Provide resources, instructional time, and gather feedback to promote student and teacher well-being.
- Incorporate trauma-informed practices as part of regular instruction and student support.

### **Engage Learners**

- Provide variation in mode of instruction, including enrichment, experiential learning, real-time feedback, and project-based learning.
- Allow for student voice and choice and provide opportunities to build students' capacity for self-directed learning.
- Create a standard action plan to identify and support students not effectively engaged in remote learning.

### **Plan for Special Education**

- Ensure students with disabilities receive all necessary supports and services through district staff and/or external providers.
- Ensure all instructional materials and content are accessible to students with disabilities and/or that staff members provide appropriate accommodations for students where necessary.
- Reference DESE [guidance on special education](#).

### **Address Needs of English Learners**

- Ensure English learners receive all necessary supports and services through district staff and/or external providers.
- Incorporate programs and content specifically designed for English learners.
- Reference DESE [guidance on English learners](#).

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<sup>1</sup> *Disclaimer: This section includes tools and resources for districts and educators who are supporting remote learning. The Department is providing this information as a service. The tools and resources listed do not represent an endorsement or recommendation by DESE of any instructional resource, product, or eLearning system.*