



E-Learning Support for Parents

E-learning poses new challenges for all students and especially those with dyslexia or other learning differences. These students are at a greater disadvantage when they cannot receive the same hands-on, explicit, multisensory instruction that in-person learning offers. Additionally, students with learning challenges may struggle to remain focused, navigate online platforms, and stay organized without having consistent monitoring from teachers. The need for educational accommodations/modifications, specialized services, and interventions are other factors that may further jeopardize student learning and performance during e-learning.

As a parent, to help you best support your child's academic trajectory during e-learning:

- Be informed.
- Ask the right questions.
- Consistently communicate concerns with your child's school team.

Below are questions to consider asking your child's school team if you do not know the answer, as well as tips for navigating e-learning.

Understand the Plan

Most students, especially those with learning differences, thrive with structure and routine. E-learning may exacerbate challenges with executive functioning and increase feelings of anxiety. Helping your child understand the daily/weekly schedule, expectations for learning, and grading policies is paramount. Consider the following questions:

- Is my child's schedule the same each day?
- If an A/B Day schedule is utilized, is my child's schedule unevenly balanced (e.g., numerous core classes on A Days & a light schedule on B Days)?
- What is the length of my child's instructional sessions and breaks?
- How will my child access specialized supports or intervention within the e-learning schedule and format if he/she has special education services, has a 504 plan, or previously received intervention prior to e-learning?
- What are expectations for engagement and participation during virtual instruction (e.g., mute noise & listen; actively participate in discussions; respond with related comments using the chat feature)? Is this consistent across teachers?
- How is my child's grade calculated, and how will each grade component be weighted (e.g., if no tests, does homework count for more points; if no group projects, is there greater emphasis on written assignments)?

Review Technology Requirements

In addition to the minimal requirements of having access to a computer or tablet with internet connectivity, e-learning poses numerous other challenges for students including learning a myriad of online platforms/applications and navigating them independently. Consider the following questions:

- What technology and steps are needed for my child to access synchronous lessons or asynchronous lessons?

- How will homework assignments be communicated to my child (e.g., via email; posted on teacher webpage; discussed during e-learning)?
- How does my child's completed work get submitted to the teacher?
- Are the above procedures uniform or variable dependent upon subject/instructor?
- What should my child do in the case of technological difficulty, such as losing internet connection or struggling to log in (i.e., what is the backup plan; who does my child call)?
- Can my child navigate technological requirements independently? If not, what is the school's plan to support my child?

Monitor Student Learning

E-learning poses challenges for students because it may limit his/her ability to receive individualized teacher attention. It also may be more difficult for teachers to gauge learning, discretely check for understanding, or gain student attention with e-learning. Consider the following questions:

- How is the teacher monitoring my child's engagement and understanding?
- What does my child do when he/she is stuck during independent learning time?
- What supports are available for my child when he/she does not understand the content or is struggling to stay organized (e.g., individual virtual sessions; an individual "to do" list emailed each morning)?
- How is the teacher, case manager, or interventionist monitoring my child's academic progress?
- How and when will teacher concerns be communicated to me/my child?
- Does the school have a plan for how to support students who do not adjust well to e-learning?

5 Important Tips to Support E-Learning

1. **Create a distraction-free space for learning** – find a quiet workspace, place smart phones out of eyesight, use headphones if there is distracting background noise, reduce clutter around workspace
2. **Regularly review the schedule for each day** – knowing the schedule will reduce anticipatory anxiety and support organization
3. **Use visuals supports** – having a visual to reference will reduce working memory demands and supports student independence and organization (e.g., print out the schedule, write the schedule on a white board, print screen shots of steps involved in accessing an online platform or website, use a red timer to show time until next break)
4. **Capitalize on breaks** – allow the student to choose how to spend break time, suggest fun and creative activities for younger students (e.g., playing Uno; doing the first few steps of a recipe), encourage movement, discourage additional screen time to give eyes respite
5. **Communicate early and often** – reach out to the school team if you believe changes are needed to meet your child's learning needs (e.g., increased 1:1 conferencing is needed to master concepts; assistance is required to support executive functioning; an adjustment is needed to the schedule)

Conclusion

Given the current health crisis, many students are facing a return to e-learning during the 2020-2021 school year. As a parent, you can maximize your child's success by educating yourself on the school's e-learning plan and expectations, collaborating with your child's school team when you have concerns, and proactively implementing strategies to facilitate your child's e-learning experience.