



# Remote Learning Plan

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Implemented by the staff of the  
Needham Public Schools in response  
to the COVID-19 health emergency

April 2, 2020

## OVERVIEW

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The current health emergency has challenged the Needham school community to completely change our normal day-to-day routines and to adopt a very new remote learning paradigm. Over the course of the last two weeks we have worked to transform our plans for what was originally a two-week hiatus into a plan for remote learning that will sustain us for a much longer duration. The remote learning plan reflects the district's commitment to providing its students and families with a continued and multifaceted learning experience and focuses on the following priorities:

- Maintain and nurture strong connections and relationships with students and families;
- Prepare and implement for remote learning to engage students directly in the curriculum in thoughtful and measured ways so all students can learn and grow; and
- Provide services and supports to help meet the many needs of all students, particularly our most vulnerable students.

While necessarily different from our traditional brick and mortar program, the core of our remote learning plan reflects these priorities as well as maintaining our commitment to academics, social emotional learning and equity that are the hallmark of an education in the Needham Public Schools.

The use of the Internet and the pace of technological growth have transformed teaching and learning in the Needham Public Schools over the last ten years. We are fortunate to be able to build upon this foundation and the infrastructure we have in place. Remote learning will change the nature of how the members of our community interact with each other. We remain committed to using the technology to maintain the communication, support, and sense of community that we deeply value. For students, remote learning will leverage technology to access content and provide real-time application of key 21st-century skills. It will also place a new emphasis on the value of independent learning and self-assessment. Our faculty are now charged with not only continuing to be outstanding teachers in an online environment, but also to balance it with their personal lives as parents, partners, and care-givers at the same time. We acknowledge that we are entering this paradigm for the first time and parents, teachers, students and administrators, will be learning and growing as our experience with remote learning evolves.

Our remote learning plan will not replace the classroom or school experience. Students will not be engaged in a 6 hour day with certain activities, lessons, and assignments scheduled in specific intervals with a teacher guiding the learning each step. This will be a truncated and very different learning environment for our students. Although it is impossible to replace the full educational experience virtually, our remote learning program seeks to provide students a range of opportunities to build their mind, body, and spirit. Whether in the classroom physically or virtually, our community will continue to promote excellence and character through our spirit of working together.

## TECHNOLOGY

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Needham Public Schools remote learning program will be using a range of technologies and practices that will serve to reinforce the student-teacher relationships as well as its academic program during the time when schools are closed due to the Covid-19 virus. Technology has always served as a conduit to explore content and teach skills, as well as a vehicle for collaboration and communication. Many of these technologies are already well-integrated into our school's academic program. Others will be relatively new for some students and members of our staff. A robust ongoing professional learning experience is being provided for all our staff.

### OUR REMOTE LEARNING PLATFORM CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

#### GOOGLE CLASSROOM

This is part of the **Google Educational Suite** of tools that we have had in place across the district for a number of years. It serves as our chief means for faculty to disseminate information to students, to receive back assignments, and to create an interactive online environment. Our students in grades 3-12 will be using Google Classroom as the platform for teaching and learning. A few teachers have been part of a pilot for the Schoology platform. Those teachers will continue to use Schoology.

#### SEESAW

This is a tool whose functionality is similar to Google Classroom. It is designed to be easier for younger students to navigate. Our students in grades K-2 will be using this remote learning platform.

#### GOOGLE MEET & ZOOM

These are the two video conferencing platforms that we will be using to engage students in remote learning and to remain connected. Both platforms allow students and their teachers the means to communicate face-to-face with one another, these technologies allow small groups to engage in meaningful online discussions.

#### GOOGLE MAIL

This part of the **Google Educational Suite** provides all members of our school community and students in grades 6-12 with the ability to easily and effectively communicate with one another.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR REMOTE LEARNING PLAN

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- Remote/on-line learning cannot replicate students' experiences in their school communities with their teachers, administrators, and support staff.
- Social-emotional & physical wellness of students and staff takes precedence over academics
- Good faith efforts toward making learning accessible to all students; equitable access is top priority
- Staff encouraged to use existing materials & resources
- Collaboration between grade levels & subject areas within & across schools for consistency and coherence

## OUR COMMITMENT

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- Maintain and nurture strong relationships with students and families
- Prepare for remote learning to engage students directly in the curriculum in thoughtful, measured ways so all students can learn and grow
- Provide services and supports to help meet the needs of students, including most vulnerable

Should you have a question about your child's experience, please reach out to the teacher or principal. We want your child engaged, and we want to hear from you if you wish to share what you are pleased with or concerned about.

## STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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Students will be engaged in a variety of learning experiences each day. The learning will take place via a combination of educator-directed learning and student self-directed learning. Learning experiences may include any of the following activities and will differ at each level:

- Large Group or small group video or conference calls
- Email
- Work packets
- Projects
- Reading lists
- Exploring the natural world

- Physical activity
- Hands-on projects
- Artistic creations that stem from students' passions and interests

In addition, the student learning experience will include the following:

- The focus of the learning experience will be on reinforcing skills already taught this school year, applying and deepening these skills or introducing new concepts.
- Learning experiences will take into account equity of access and support for all students.
- The individual student experience will vary depending on student age, individual and family needs, access and capacity for remote learning.
- Given the circumstances and the realities of remote learning, content taught will reflect the essential concepts of the existing curriculum. These essential curriculum concepts will be the same across the district for grade levels and subject areas.
- Our plan is to begin the remote learning experiences on Monday, April 6, 2020. Please understand that it will be a slow rollout as everyone transitions to this new learning environment. If you have a question about your child's learning or the experiences, please reach out to the teacher.

## THE SCHEDULE

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Our online learning schedule offers opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous learning and flexibility during the school day. Students will have the opportunity to engage in both class community building and academic learning activities at times that are adaptable to family and student individual needs. Teachers will have "office hours" and the discretion to use these meeting periods in any manner they deem most useful for their discipline, grade level, student learning needs. Each teacher will be posting their respective office hours schedule. Built into the schedule is time for teachers to gather as departments or grade levels to share and improve best practices for online learning. Administrative teams will meet to discuss feedback from all of our constituencies and work to adjust structures/expectations to ensure that our students and families continue to have a positive learning experience.

Here's an overview of the typical time expected for students to be engaged in learning on a daily basis. The hours listed reflect a target length of time for student engagement with learning, not the amount of screen time they will be experiencing. These guidelines are inclusive of direct teacher contact time (with classroom, special area, and special education teachers); support time with counselors, nurses, and other related service providers; student collaboration time; and individual student work time.

- PreK: up to 1 hour/day
- K to Grade 2: up to 2 hours/day
- Grades 3 to 4: up to 2.5 hours/day
- Grades 5 to 8: up to 3 hours/day
- Grades 9 to 12: up to 3.5 hours/day

While we know that the digital learning space cannot replace the feel, structure, and experience of being in a classroom, we believe this schedule will allow our students to continue their learning while maintaining a connection to their classroom and school community. It will enable our faculty to reflect on their work as online educators and constantly innovate and iterate to provide your children with an engaging program. Schools will be reaching out to their respective communities to share the specifics of the plan, including the schedule, as it applies to them.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

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During school closures, students' Individual Education Programs (IEPs) will be implemented to the best extent possible within a Remote Learning Environment. Schools may not be able to provide all services in the same manner they are typically provided. Supports and services will be provided that allow equally effective access and opportunity for remote learning designed to reinforce knowledge and skills as well as to ensure students are provided with the opportunity to work towards IEP goals. Plans for how and to what extent special education will be implemented for each student will be communicated through [Remote Learning Support/Service Plans](#). Each student's plan will be individualized to meet his/her/their needs and may include supports and services such as: *Email Check-In, Suggested Activities/Activity Packets (online and offline), Projects, Video Message/Post, Action Planning, Daily "To Do" lists, Phone Check-In, Apps, consultation, and instruction & services through individual or group phone or video conference and online platforms*. Families should expect to hear from their student's special education liaison within the upcoming week regarding the Remote Learning Supports/Services Plan for their student.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL)

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The ELL department is committed to making best efforts to assure that English Learner students have the support they need to access the general education instruction provided during this school closure. ELL teachers will work with teachers, staff, students, and families to support this learning synchronously (real time) and asynchronously (students learn at different times), as appropriate. ELL teachers will work to advance the English development of each ELL student in the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) by providing appropriate support and instruction commensurate with individual student language level and needs. ELL teachers will also work to support the social-emotional wellbeing of their students and the particular needs of their families.

## GUIDANCE SERVICES

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Guidance counselors will be providing support and guidance to students and parents/guardians during this very difficult time. Counselors will be available through email and can arrange meetings using Zoom or Google Meet / Hangout. Students and parents are encouraged to email their specific counselor to provide updates on family situations, ask for advice, or to seek support during this difficult time.

## ATTENDANCE

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We are encouraging student participation and engagement in the activities provided by their teacher(s) on a regular basis. Doing so is an important component of their learning. In addition to helping to maintain a sense of community and connection to their teachers, it will help to inform our outreach efforts to individual families to ensure student safety and wellbeing during this challenging time. Participation and engagement will look different at each level.

We understand that learning from home is complex, and have encouraged our teachers to be as flexible as possible in meeting the needs of our students and their families. Should a situation arise that impacts a student's participation due to personal circumstances, be sure to get in touch with their teacher, advisor or guidance counselor.

## STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

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The Needham Public Schools remote learning plan reflects the goals of our Portrait of a Graduate by promoting and fostering students to take a greater ownership of their learning. Outlined below are some suggestions that will contribute to a successful learning experience. As always, students should continue to rely on their teachers and advisors for support, guidance, and clarification. As in all other aspects of this plan, student responsibilities will vary by level.

- Establish a daily routine
- Create an environment free from distractions
- Ensure easy access to necessary books/materials
- Access Google Classroom or SeeSaw on a daily basis for assignments
- Communicate and interact in a digital world in an appropriate manner whether that be in an audio or video format
- Carefully complete the work assigned by their teachers, participate in online discussion opportunities, and make the best use of extra help sessions to the extent possible
- Check email regularly
- Communicate with teachers, advisors, counselors
- Complete homework and any assigned projects
- Do your best and put effort into the work

## TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

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In a district that places great emphasis on social-emotional learning, our teacher's commitment to our students has never been more important. Teachers remain dedicated to providing a quality educational experience while taking care of the social emotional needs of our students.

Our online learning plan builds on the social-emotional practices that teachers utilize on a daily basis in their classrooms. These practices include:

- Foster a sense of community and connectedness among the students whenever possible. Collaborate with colleagues
- Assign appropriate flexible learning activities or assignments for students with consideration of the remote learning environment
- Solicit feedback and ideas from students
- Provide a clear weekly schedule
- Clearly communicate classroom norms and expectations for all online interactions and collaboration
- Regularly post "office hours" to communicate availability and the preferred method of communication
- Communicate with department/grade level colleagues regularly to review and improve online lessons/activities

## PARENT ADVICE

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Parents and family members play an essential role in a student's online educational experience. While families have always been engaged in the nuances and expectations associated with supporting their child's work, the ideas outlined below will further help your child to learn and thrive in an online learning environment

- Establish a daily routine and daily expectations for your child.
- Help your child plan the week's activities and work
- Check-in with your child regarding their work and engage them in a discussion of their work
- Help your child create an environment that is conducive to
- Support opportunities for your child to exercise or be outdoors or be involved in the arts
- Establish guidelines for your child's screen time
- Reach out to your child's teacher, advisor or guidance counselor with concerns, questions, and for support
- Be a supportive partner with your child's teacher(s)

## IN SUMMARY

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Moving forward, Needham Public Schools is committed to providing continuity for our students as they look to make academic progress and enhance their knowledge, skills, and competencies. The district's plan for remote learning is consistent with DESE's newest guidance and will roll out in a thoughtful manner for all grade levels starting the week of April 6th. It will look different at each level so that expectations are aligned with students' developmental needs.

Specific structures and schedules for remote learning will be provided and shared with families by your school principals. Teachers have been working tirelessly with their colleagues and leaders to craft programs at each level and to retrofit existing processes and procedures in order to continue servicing students and their families in the context of our "new normal."

We are in an unexpected and steep learning curve and all members of the Needham Public Schools are working together to learn and teach in our current environment. It is our commitment to pull together to help students continue learning over this extended period.

We welcome and appreciate your partnership, and we welcome your feedback as we collaborate as educators and parents to help your children grow during this uncertain time and always.