

Florida Inclusion Network

The Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) collaborates with all districts and schools to provide customized services and supports ensuring all students with disabilities have the same educational, social, and future opportunities as their peers. In partnership with districts, FIN facilitates the implementation of inclusive best practices through:

- Data-driven, student-focused planning and problem-solving across districts and schools.
- Data-driven professional development and technical assistance to increase knowledge and skills of district and school personnel.
- Coaching and resources for district and school personnel to sustain inclusive best practices.
- Sharing information to build collaborative relationships between families, schools, and districts.

Our facilitators can provide information about effective inclusive practices, family-school collaboration and communication, opportunities for networking with other families, and ways to access local resources and support.



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Back to (Virtual) School: 5 Things Parents Can Do to Support Students in Virtual Courses by Sarah Cornelius

Virtual learning is changing the way that students can learn. However, just because the environment looks different does not mean that relationships are any less central to the learning process for students enrolled in virtual courses. Parents and other caregivers offer some of the most critical guidance that students need to be successful in their academic journey. For students enrolled in virtual programs, the basic support they need from parents is much the same as any traditional student—positivity, accountability, and the knowledge that family members are aware of and care about what they’re working on. But, virtual learning does come with some unique logistics and additional challenges that parents and caregivers can be instrumental in to help their children manage.

Here are five things parents can do to help their child achieve success in virtual courses:

Help Your Child Build a Schedule

One of the biggest draws of virtual learning is the flexibility it offers. That flexibility, though, comes at the price of the structure that the traditional classroom provides. Students in virtual courses need to build their own routines and effectively manage their time in order to stay on track. Having a well-thought-out, specific daily schedule is key, and parents can be a huge help not only in building such a plan but also in making sure that it is followed. Before your child’s virtual course(s) begins, sit down together and think through what he or she is responsible for accomplishing in his or her virtual courses on a daily or weekly basis, how much time those tasks will realistically take, and what other commitments (sports, arts, work, family engagements, etc.) he or she needs to consider. Bring your child’s virtual teacher(s) into the conversation too—teachers can offer valuable insight into what the demands of virtual courses really look like and how time will need to be budgeted. Once you’ve talked through everything on your child’s plate, help him or her

write out a weekly schedule with designated work time for online courses. Be sure to hang up the schedule in a noticeable place, like on the refrigerator or next to any other family master calendars, to help keep your child accountable and establish an effective routine.

Model Hard Work and Persistence

Success in virtual courses takes a high level of intrinsic motivation and self-directed effort. For some virtual students, this motivation comes naturally, but for others, especially those new to online courses, getting accustomed to self-pacing and working through the normal, productive struggles of learning more independently can be challenging. Parents and other caregivers can make a big difference simply by demonstrating the ubiquity and importance of these skills in the “real world” beyond school.

Talking to your child about your own work and goals is a great place to start. Tell him or her about difficult projects you’re working on, new skills you’re trying to master, and challenges you’ve faced. For instance, do you have a big presentation coming up at work? Tell your child about the extra time you’re putting in to prepare. Are you in the process of taking up a new hobby? Tell your child about how you’ve had to try and fail. Take time to sit down with him or her while he or she is working on coursework to tackle some projects of your own. These don’t have to be big talks or perfect examples (and don’t expect to hold your child’s rapt attention), but demonstrating your own hard work and motivated attitude will help your child take a similar approach.

Set Up a Designated Workspace

For everyone, surroundings make a huge difference in one’s mindset and ability to focus. Students taking virtual courses have the ability to complete their work where they want, so it’s important to put thought into what kind of environment is truly most effective for them and make sure that they have a designated space at home.

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Think about your child's personality and needs as a starting point to create a workspace tailored to him or her, and be sure to have a direct conversation with your child about where and how he or she will be most comfortable working on the virtual courses. If your child thrives on quiet, make sure that he or she has a desk and comfortable chair in the room. If he or she needs a little more interaction and hands-on accountability, a desk or table in the living room or kitchen may be a better option. You can also look into options provided by your child's school, like monitored, dedicated lab space for virtual students. And, no matter what the workspace looks like, be sure that your child has easy access to the materials and supplies that he or she will need to be efficient, like good headphones; a wireless mouse if he or she will be working on a laptop; and plenty of notepaper, pens, and other office basics.

Familiarize Yourself with the Virtual Learning Platform

Students taking virtual courses spend their school days immersed in an online program. For parents, taking the time to get familiar with what that platform looks like, how your child is using it, and what resources are available are some of the best ways you can offer support. Start by exploring any orientation resources provided by the virtual learning platform alongside your child. Make sure that your child is comfortable navigating through the courses and completing basic tasks like submitting assignments and checking grades. Be sure to spend time on communication tools available to your child as well, like built-in messaging features, video-conferencing tools like Zoom, or basic phone and email use. Regular communication between students and the teacher is absolutely critical in virtual courses. Many virtual course providers also offer parent portals—be sure to find and explore any tools like this so that you can monitor your child's progress. If the virtual program offers any materials or guides specifically created for parents and caregivers, take the time to read through them. It's your child's course, but by knowing the program, you will have a better grasp on what his or her learning looks like and how you can most effectively provide support.

Build a Relationship with Your Child's Teachers

Virtual teachers are teachers like any others! They're qualified, dedicated professionals who want to build strong relationships with their students—and part of that is getting to know students' families and broader support systems. For parents, your child's virtual teachers are your primary teammates in supporting your child through his or her online schoolwork. Nearly all virtual courses require a certain amount of communication back and forth between students and teachers, but these teachers are also available to you. Be proactive about reaching out to them at the beginning of your child's course to introduce yourself and talk about how you want to partner and communicate (don't hesitate to use all the forms of communication available to your child, including video conferencing!). If you have questions about the course or concerns about your child's progress, reach out and discuss them with his or her teacher. And, certainly not least, share successes! You see your child on a very regular basis—the virtual teachers don't. When you see your child reaching goals, making productive changes, or hitting important milestones, tell the teacher about it—it's guaranteed that your child will appreciate the positive feedback coming from multiple angles.

Source: <https://blog.edmentum.com/back-virtual-school-5-things-parents-can-do-support-students-virtual-courses>

The author Sarah Cornelius is an Associate Product Manager at Edmentum and has been with the company since 2014. In her role, she works to provide educators with engaging and insightful resources. Sarah received her B.S. in Professional Communications and Emerging Media from the University of Wisconsin - Stout.

Podcast Series—Parent Wellbeing and Student Learning During School Closures

By Steve Barkley—Education Consultant

For the past 35 years, Steve has served as an educational consultant to school districts, teacher organizations, state departments of education, and colleges and universities nationally and internationally, facilitating the changes necessary for them to reach students and successfully prepare them for the 21st century. A prolific published author, his weekly blog, *Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud*, has evolved into a go-to resource for teachers and administrators all over the world.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on education, Steve started a new podcast group called *Parent Well-Being and Student Learning During School Closures*. The hope is that these podcasts can be used by parents to help support them in their new role with their children during this time.

Click the following LINK to access Steve Barkley's Podcasts for Parents on his website <https://barkleypd.com/topics/podcasts/podcasts-for-parents/>



[Understood.org](https://www.understood.org/)

Shaping the world for difference.™

Understood.org is dedicated to shaping a world where millions of people who learn and think differently can thrive at home, at school, and at work.

Their Families, Educators, and Young Adults programs were created to serve the millions of people in the United States who learn and think differently, and their Workplace Initiative serves the 15 million working-age Americans with disabilities.

They're dedicated to growing and shaping a world where everyone who learns and thinks differently feels supported at home, at school, and at work; a world where people with all types of disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy meaningful careers; a world where more communities embrace differences.

[Understood.org](https://www.understood.org/) is a new, free online resource (in English and Spanish) that is aimed at providing families with the practical tools and advice for their child's academic, social, and emotional journey.

The website offers the following (and more):

- A feature that allows the parent to fill out a "Just for You" profile that will cull articles to fit your interests and your child's age and issues.
- A "Parenting Coach" feature that allows parents to search for ideas and advice based on the specific challenge (i.e. "ADHD," "Transitioning from Task to Task," or "Dealing with Anxiety and Fear") and grade-level.
- A "Tech Finder" feature that helps you find expert-approved apps and games for your child based on: issue (i.e. "Listening comprehension" or "Motor skills"); grade; and technology type (i.e. "App," "Game," or "Website").
- A "Through Your Child's Eyes" feature that allows the parents to experience, first-hand, what their child's struggle is based on grade-level and issue (i.e. "Reading issues," "Writing issues," or "Attention issues").
- Helpful articles.

The following LINK will take you to the website for Understood.org

<https://www.understood.org/>

Where their goal "is to help the millions of parents whose children, ages 3–20, are struggling with learning and attention issues. They want to empower parents to understand their children's issues and relate to their experiences."

Microsoft Learning Tools for the inclusive classroom

Microsoft Education has a set of learning tools for the inclusive classroom that span reading, writing math and communication. These tools are built into all of Microsoft products, including Teams, OneNote, Flipped, Minecraft, Forms, Word, PowerPoint and more. To help educators, parents, and students more easily learn and understand how these capabilities work together, Microsoft has a set of training resources, videos and other useful guides to help get started.

Immersive Reader

- Inclusive Classroom public deck: <https://aka.ms/InclusiveDeck>
- All About Immersive Reader page for PD: <https://aka.ms/AllAboutImmersiveReader>
- Immersive Reader partners: <https://aka.ms/ImmersiveReaderPartners>
- Dyslexia Awareness course on MEC: <https://aka.ms/MECMadeByDyslexia>

Access Microsoft's **FREE**, **web-based**, **interactive** training guides. Microsoft has made interactive click-through guides for each of the four categories of online tools across reading, writing, math and communication. These guides are easily sharable and are popular with educators, parents, students, and school leaders. They've created a guide for each topic, with **LINKS** below:

- Inclusive Reading: <https://aka.ms/InclusiveReadingDemo>
- Inclusive Writing: <https://aka.ms/InclusiveWritingDemo>
- Inclusive Math: <https://aka.ms/InclusiveMathDemo>
- Inclusive Communication: <https://aka.ms/InclusiveCommunicationDemo>



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