10 Tips to Help Schools Prepare for Distance Learning--VILS, Digital Promise

1.    **Create an “Online Learning Doctrine”** to set teaching and learning expectations for teachers, parents, and students from the outset. Here is [one example](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1o_zUUy9O5Pj6ZpqzCzeRGIiCIcXS0JLKjVo--HVIeMU/preview).

2.    **Set up classes in a learning management system** such as [Google Classroom](https://cloud.google.com/blog/products/g-suite/helping-businesses-and-schools-stay-connected-in-response-to-coronavirus), Microsoft Teams, or Schoology. These platforms should already be familiar to students. If you haven’t already used the tool in class, don’t start using it now, as it may cause confusion for students, which could take away from actual learning.

3.    **Find online platforms** to share resources, conduct online discussions, and allow students to post work, such as Padlet, Flipgrid, and SeeSaw. Many of these platforms will also allow you to see how much time students spend within them, which can help identify the need for further learning support. Some applications, like [Kahoot](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fkahoot.com%2fblog%2f2020%2f02%2f27%2fkahoot-free-access-schools-higher-education-coronavirus%2f&c=E,1,38qyKONelqW6poTxqnY_IhPHL0jw61psfCUfCUPgEL1UfRoUkrAH-2owSe1DR4gt7_gvKCSgMQQSbxsHctz16-yA0PZV5YXOWVy0cQKo17zp77fj6MriEw,,&typo=1), [Pear Deck](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fwww.peardeck.com%2fgoogleslides&c=E,1,WkCrBPda9Ko_tobvStBgWql1I7VdNi1aJE7zFQVdMwkWPEKHcnfWOpRP7k-q4zhNa9ThDBcUfcHUeSA-qvDPOhIN8W5K76MX7ohUtLoDYhb24vNBcw,,&typo=1), and [Nearpod](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fnearpod.com%2fteach3%3futm_expid%3d.S1iIyIChT8eWB8rPJSE-pA.1%26utm_referrer%3d&c=E,1,rQatoPv3pnNOWkyIbR4bj8uTVyjKRLbetWOB1vmiuTozCR7hlGbDk5y4pOqE7SYnTmVvv2gXeO1AsdCGPaZ5M3a0RXjhPKYwi9lz4URi2YdttN1iteCIumsTgqDS&typo=1), are providing free premium access for closed schools.

4.    **Help students plan their day**. Create a daily to-do list or structured timetable with set times for each subject, including breaks and social time. Use color coding to assist students with organizational deficits, and incorporate a checklist. Consider starting the day with a whole-class “meeting” using platforms like Google Hangouts, Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams. Be cognizant that your students will have digital lessons from all of their teachers, which will likely equate to much more academic screen time than they are used to. Rethink assignments, keeping in mind that online work has less context, and incorporate some offline tasks.

5.    **Consider synchronous and asynchronous learning**. If your class involves video, you’ll have to decide between live streaming versus pre-recorded videos and screencasts. A mix of both may be a useful strategy. Pre-recorded videos should be 3-4 minutes long and include closed captioning for English language learners or those with reading deficits.

6.    **Don’t simply record lessons**—provide opportunities for discourse, connection, and feedback. [Flipgrid](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYSKTw5qgy8&feature=emb_title) has a powerful whiteboard feature that allows teachers to demonstrate and students to show their thinking. This back-and-forth sharing can make lessons more social and connected.

7.    **Find a forum to present lessons** that all students can access to learn and can return to later if they need to watch again to relearn. YouTube and [EdPuzzle](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWRseaT7-9U&feature=youtu.be) are great options to create video-based lessons.

8.    **Keep your webcam on**. One downside to online lessons is the loss of the personal connection between teachers and students. When providing live video instruction to a group of students, keep your webcam on as much as possible. When students can see your face, it adds a personal connection back into the lesson.

9.    **Make sure that students have a way to communicate with you** for learning and tech support to avoid student frustration. Ensure that students and parents know which channels to check for messages from you and to whom they should/can reach out to for common problems. Consider holding set office hours when you will be available for live support each day.

10.  **Create differentiated self-paced lessons** using the [Google Forms branching feature](https://gowhereyougrow.wordpress.com/2019/10/14/personalising-learning-with-branching-google-forms/). This allows for differentiation in how and what students learn and can provide you with real-time progress updates and formative assessment data. [EdPuzzle](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fedpuzzle.com%2f&c=E,1,jNBgjgXqS0N_MVurTWOP8np2GKP_49GPiHzr7jwRkEAZKMzbvKK7uUBdLwCanhkOe5YOEgRe5PaQShACOLBY-FJCoQSiG0zZbLyUBJX8vpEs&typo=1) is another great tool for self-paced learning. Giving students choices can also naturally differentiate based upon different learning styles and needs. Be sure to show students how they might adjust their online learning environment for their specific needs, and consider working with your special education pros to make support or tutorials available.