# Recommendations for Instructional Leaders

The *Recommendations for Instructional Leaders* are designed to provide action steps and guidance for principals, coaches, counselors, social workers, media coordinators and others who support educators and staff in their transition to remote learning.

RATIONALE

During the COVID-19 crisis, communities across the world are adjusting to a new way of life, "Stay Home, Save Lives" that impacts all facets of their lives, including education. School leadership is essential to help teachers, students and families adjust to learning from home. Teachers and school staff are used to face-to-face interactions with students every day. Now, they must rely on remote learning to educate and connect with their students. Families are looking to schools for academic and emotional supports to help their children during this unprecedented time in our lives. School leaders have the opportunity to provide clarity and guidance as they embark on the journey of remote learning. As we ask educators to quickly shift teaching practices, we must provide teachers with the skills they need to succeed. Now more than ever, school staff are looking to instructional leaders for guidance.

Ensure Equity for Students and Staff

Develop Communication Structures

Provide Flexibility

Support Teachers in Implementing Instruction

Celebrate Success

Communicate a Clear Vision

Plan for Re-entry

The Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change is a valuable tool to use for managing complex change in a successful way. The model provides a framework to help leaders think through the process and explains that for any initiative to be successful five things must be present: Vision, Skills, Incentives, Resources, and Action Plan. The Knoster Model can also help leaders diagnose what may be missing if stakeholders are not successful.
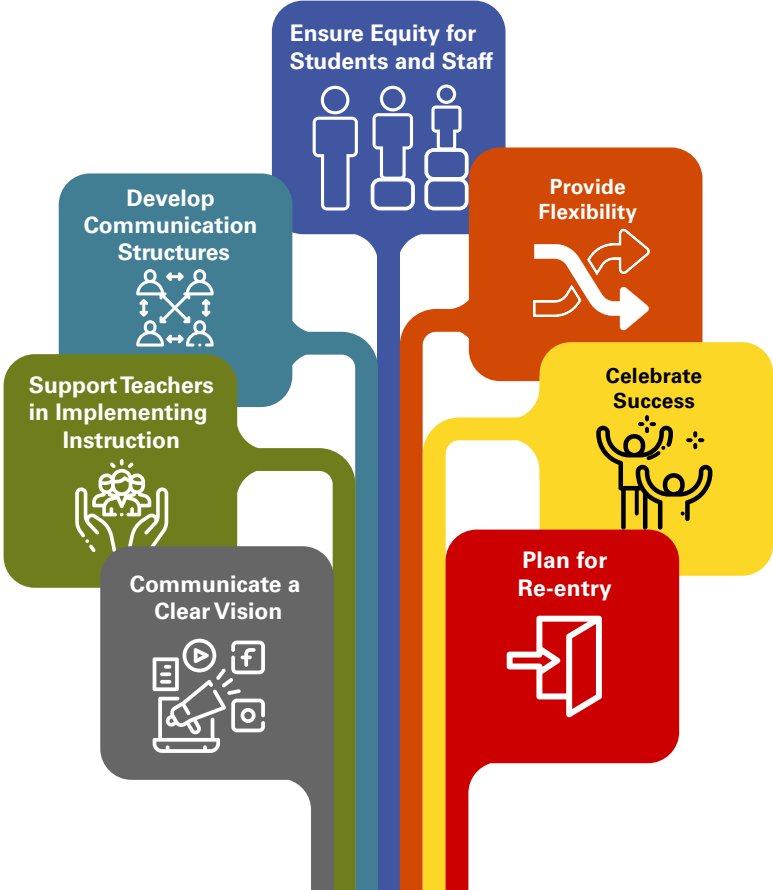
Model for Managing Complex Change

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Success
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Missing	=	False Starts
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Missing	Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Missing	Resources	Action Plan	=	Resistance
Vision	Missing	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Missing	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Confusion

Adapted from Knoster, T. (1991) Presentation in TASH Conference. Washington, D.C. Adapted by Knoster from Enterprise Group, Ltd.

While keeping the Knoster Model in mind, the following guiding principles will help school leaders navigate the new world of remote learning.

Communicate a Clear Vision

In this time of constant change in our personal and professional lives, school leaders should communicate a clear vision for teaching and learning remotely. *The Instructional Design Principles for Remote Learning* provides a common language for lesson design and reflection that school leaders can share with instructional leaders. Instructional leaders should provide guidance for teachers, including model lessons, sample schedules and best practices for remote learning. Recommendations for communicating a clear vision for remote learning, including expectations and challenges are:

- Hold virtual faculty meetings, where teachers can ask questions and seek advice.

- Provide opportunities for reflection, including what is working and what is not.

- Designate a dynamic location to share lesson plans and video exemplars.

- Ensure teachers have the academic and technological support they need.

Support Educators and Staff in Implementing Instruction

Teachers need support from school and instructional leaders to develop effective remote learning lesson plans to meet the needs of all students. This includes, but is not limited to: guidance counselors, social workers, instructional technology facilitators, district office specialists Exceptional Children teachers, Academically & Intellectually Gifted (AIG) specialists, coaches, media coordinators, and teacher assistants. To facilitate collaboration and support, school leaders should consider the following strategies:

- Encourage regular, at least once or twice per week, virtual PLC meetings that also include virtual supports.

- Include instructional technology facilitators in the process to help adapt lesson plans to utilize technology.

- Offer opportunities to share successes and brainstorm trouble spots.

- Recommend specialists, counselors, and other staff offer office hours to provide another resource for students.

- Encourage teachers and teacher assistants to reach out to students on a regular basis to ensure students feel connected and supported.

Develop Communication Structures

Focusing on communication structures that will sustain your school community and reinforce a sense of belonging across distances helps everyone. When developing communication structures, it is important to think about the entire school community, including teachers, staff, students and parents. Communication with these groups is always important, but is especially vital in time of crisis. Schools should leverage technology and utilize existing communication tools, when possible. It is important for leaders to first consider how we communicate with each group under *normal* circumstances and then prioritize which communications are the most important. Teachers and families do not need to be inundated with communication that is not directly relevant to remote learning. School leaders should create new communication structures to meet the needs of teachers, students and families during this time of crisis. Recommendations for new communication structures include:

- Share remote learning expectations and clarify any points of confusion around plans for grading, instructional time, and class meeting times.

- Share weekly messages to check in with families and to let them know what to expect for upcoming learning opportunities.

- Establish predictable channels for staff members to communicate with each other through virtual faculty meetings and other convenings.

Ensure Equity for Students and Staff

Crises have a way of exposing the inequities in our society. Whether the school building is closed due to an unexpected hurricane or an unforeseen pandemic, the most vulnerable communities tend to suffer the most. During these times, it is vital that instructional leaders provide the necessary structures that allow themselves and all other members of their staff to continue to "deliver equitable opportunities for every student...bearing in mind that 'fair' is not always 'equal', and equal is not always equitable" as defined in the NC Equity Plan. It is important that instructional leaders practice equity through grace not just with students, but with staff as well. The professional and personal lives of every educator has drastically changed and it is important to recognize that many staff members are facing social and economic challenges. Teachers may not be able to work "normal" hours as they are taking care of children or others during the day. The traditional school day and the roles of instructional leaders and staff members will need to be redefined to adapt to remote learning. By extending equitable practices to the school staff, all educators will be in a better position to support student learning. Suggestion include:

- Utilize the school as a hub for food and other supplies for local families.
- Provide devices and hotspots to staff and families.
- Allocate resources to other schools that have a higher demand.
- Encourage teachers to connect individually with students with special needs.
- Develop additional educational resources to meet the needs of students with special needs and EC students.

Provide Flexibility

Everyone is adjusting to new schedules, a new way of life and full-time remote learning is definitely new for everyone. It is important that leaders provide ample time and support for educators to adjust to this method of teaching. At the same time we must recognize that the shift to remote learning is difficult for families, as they are now asked to provide a home learning environment for their children. Encouraging administrators, teachers, students and families to be flexible is essential as we are all figuring out remote learning together. Normal school schedules and content delivery will be much different than before and everyone will need to adapt. Recommendations for providing flexible supports include:

- Include a member of the administrative team at teachers weekly PLC meetings.
- Encourage teachers to ask questions and provide a feedback loop on what's working and what's not.
- Partner with other schools in your district to share lesson ideas and strategies.
- Offer options for staff to work asynchronously with students during hours that work best for their situation.
- Gracefully allow flexibility in how and when staff members work for those who need the extra support.

Celebrate and Appreciate Efforts

Because everything is changing so quickly, it is easy to focus on the challenges and the daily obstacles, rather than the successes. Teachers are trying to meet the needs of their students and looking for affirmation from leaders to help them navigate the new landscape. Celebrating the small victories and highlighting what is working well will go a long way with staff members. Some examples of how schools can celebrate and appreciate efforts of staff during this time include:

- Implement staff meeting "shout outs" recognizing hard work and flexibility.
- Send thank you notes to teachers and staff.
- Connect with teachers on an individual basis and ask what they need.

Plan for Re-entry

While the focus right now is clearly on transitioning to remote instruction, it is important to start making plans for the transition back to face-to-face instruction. This is important for instructional elements, as well as extra-curricular and end of year events and processes. The timeline may be nebulous, but having some key components in place to welcome students back and support educators and families in the transition will accelerate and ease the transition to face-to-face learning. To begin this process, instructional leaders can:

- Create a re-entry team.
- Document the key areas to address for re-entry.
- Consider additional safety precautions.

Applying the Recommendations for Instructional Leaders

The *Recommendations for Instructional Leaders* are intended to serve as guideposts for supporting educators and staff in implementing remote learning. They are also a reminder that educators and staff will need frequent and clear communication and check-ins to ensure their well-being. Everyone in our communities need flexibility in adapting to remote learning and in being open to learning as the weeks progress. Instructional leaders who support our educators and staff play a critical role in ensuring that our schools continue to function and thrive as the hubs of our communities.