



THE GLASGOW GROUP LLC

Best Practices in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion During Distance Learning

During this pandemic, schools were thrust suddenly into an online delivery of their academic and co-curricular programming. As we continue to distill our best practices for an online learning environment, some common considerations have already emerged related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is important that we keep our diversity practitioners at the table and in administrative conversations during this time so that we do not replicate or create new practices and policies that promote inequities. Consider the impact of practices and policies on all community members, which includes your non-teaching employees. Develop a system to support previously identified marginalized groups, while identifying marginalized groups that emerge as a direct result of the crisis. Remember that trained diversity practitioners are skilled at crisis management and bring their tools of conflict resolution, human-centered design, multiple perspective-taking, and nuanced language that will only enhance a school's ability to respond appropriately and successfully during times like these. In our conversations with diversity practitioners, the following have arisen as best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion during distance learning.

1. Be graceful with your policies about a student's camera during online classes. While there are many valid reasons to mandate that the cameras are on, **find ways to signal to students that if they don't want the class to be able to see their surroundings, they can be exempt from the camera for the most part.** Also, use platforms that allow for user-created backgrounds that allow the student to be on camera, but not have their homes visible. If you are using a platform with user-created background capabilities, **send students a few common, school-based backgrounds that they could use.** For ultimate equity, you might require a standard background or a choice from a few school-based background options so that everyone's home is not subject to the camera.
2. Relatedly, consider your guidelines for student attire and comportment online as opposed to your school's regular dress code. **If moving to a more relaxed dress code (which is recommended), be clear about what types of dress are not allowable. Give specific attention to clothing that may have offensive or inappropriate words, images, or messages.** Be clear about what the school considers offensive or inappropriate in this context. Additionally, allow for grace for students who may wear hats, hoods, or other things to cover their full appearance, **understanding that there are personal and cultural implications around hair and comportment during this time.**
3. In making suggestions or guidelines about where a student conducts their distance learning, **be mindful that some homes have multiple options for where a student could set themselves up to work, while other homes have less options for work space.** This will be

dictated not only by the physical space of the home but also the amount of people working and schooling from home in a particular household. When we make suggestions such as not working in your bedroom or finding a space where you can spread out all of your things, or moving from one space to another as a strategy to keep focused throughout the day, you may be suggesting things which are not possible for all. Again, they are great suggestions, but have grace and nuance as you suggest them.

4. As we create lesson plans for home-based, online learning, especially in times when securing additional items can prove a significant challenge, **be careful about asking students to use items around the home for projects or even asking what students may have on hand at home. For equity's sake, create projects that do not assume or require specific items** that may leave some students with and others without what is needed for the assignment. Remember that students may not have printers, scanners, and other tech items available at home. Think about this when assigning readings that will add to their screen time.
 - a. Consider extending or eliminating deadlines where appropriate or possible. All students are experiencing levels of grief, trauma, and anxiety during this experience.
 - b. Use your recorded classes with students as a tool to review, revise and challenge your teaching practices. Make note of who you call on most often, which students are engaged and disengaged, who might be advantaged or disadvantaged by your style of teaching or the culture you create.
5. We can not replicate the daily school experience online. It is important that we step out of the traditional educational box and redesign time, space and its impact on learning through a DEI lens. **Schedules should show a consideration for students of varying abilities, learning styles, and learning challenges which may be heightened by the online learning environment.** This includes more frequent and/or longer break times to allow for movement.
6. **Remember that we are physical distancing, not social distancing. Find ways to continue building community while online** through office hours, exploratory activities, and small group time. For our sense of belonging, **your school might consider continuing to have its affinity groups and diversity clubs meeting online as these are important outlets for students and critical to positive identity development.** Engaging the wider community through virtual assemblies, online discussions, and utilizing the advisory program in a virtual format will be key to helping others see and understand the ways that diversity, equity, and inclusion remain significant even (and especially!) in an online environment.
7. **Students who were having mental and emotional challenges such as anxiety, depression and self-harming behaviors, need intentional time and attention paid to them during the online learning period.** Ensure that a school counselor or support person is checking in with them regularly and that there is a plan in place at home for their on-going support. Additionally, situations like a pandemic can heighten everyone's fears and anxieties and lead to withdrawal or acting out behaviors. **Acknowledge to students, families, and**



employees that there is an event significantly impacting all of us. When we try to shield from the outside world, it creates a dissonance that can do emotional and psychological damage. It is important that we name that there is a pandemic which will cause various reactions as we move through it (you might reference the stages of grief as a frame), and invite them to seek the resources of the school's support personnel if needed.

8. Be careful of the kinds of microaggressions that you could deliver in an online classroom. **Remain as objective as you can when commenting, rather than making subjective comments or assuming intentionally when describing a student's behaviors or demeanor.** For example, rather than saying "lately you seem disengaged during class", you might focus more on the desired behavior and say, "your engagement in class could be improved by," and you might also give grace in understanding that there may be factors outside of class which are impacting ability to engage. These are important in verbal and written comments to students. **It is important to remember that everyone is coping differently at this time and have different potential stressors and responsibilities at home.**
9. When incidents arise that involve identity-targeted behavior, demeaning language or actions, or other discriminatory and inflammatory behaviors that would constitute bullying or harassment, address them as decisively and quickly as you would normally. **It is important for students to see that the rules and norms that created a safe and respectful environment on campus are also applied to your online environment.** For example, if a class gets Zoom-bombed and witnesses hateful words or behaviors, it should be debriefed with the class and addressed appropriately for its impact on all. Don't allow the distancing feel of technology to minimize the impact on those who were present.
10. For some students, being at home almost exclusively for a prolonged period of time raises concerns about their identity. You may have LGBTQ+ students who are not out, and suddenly find themselves losing the brave and open space of school. There may be students whose family structures present complications for them - separations, divorce, etc. - that are now heightened by the amount of time they are spending at home. Some students received the bulk of their meals at school and may now be facing more food insecurity as the school breakfast and/or lunch program is not available to them at this time. Some students will be faced with additional responsibilities for loved ones in the home during this time of quarantine. **Remember that your school is a safe place and a home for many of your students, and be proactive in ensuring that each student has an adult from school - an advisor, teacher, division head, counselor, or coach - who is providing space for one on one check-ins.**

