

# LAUNCH NEBRASKA



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## Attendance Matters

***Connected. Present.  
Engaged. Supported.***

Educators and School Leaders





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# Attendance Matters: Connected, Present, Engaged, Supported

The mission of the Nebraska Department of Education is to lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living. As Nebraska schools navigate the complicated transition into the fall, students must be connected, present, engaged, and supported across all learning modalities. Attendance was critical before COVID-19. Now attendance and access look different. *The purpose of this document is to outline helpful resources and considerations for educators.*

## Foundational Values:

- **Equity** - We must ensure our students, especially those who have been historically underserved, maintain access to high quality teaching.
- **Quality** - While flexibility and innovation must be pursued, we must not back down from our standards for quality.
- **Flexibility** - We must pursue flexibilities in regulations and innovations to ensure students have access to high quality teaching.
- **Safety** - Learning cannot occur if the school community does not feel safe in their environment.
- **Decisive** - Given the size and scope of the challenge, we must move deliberately and make tough choices. We will make mistakes, and we will adapt quickly as variables on the ground change.

Whether a student is learning from home or in person, attendance can be directly addressed by ensuring students are:



### Connected

Technology infrastructure and devices are present for the student to learn.



### Present

Schools examine and expand their definition of “present” beyond just a student sitting in a seat.



### Engaged

Engagement means the curiosity, attention, passion that students show when learning or being taught.



### Supported

Educating a student requires attending to the whole child, including social emotional, mental, and physical health and well-being.



## **Connected**

Schools across the nation are attempting to dial in answers to the questions about home access since understanding the true scope and nature of the gap is critical to solving the challenge. Data collection is a critical first step in addressing this challenge. School districts in Nebraska need to collect data that moves from understanding the estimated percentage of students without adequate access to the Internet to understanding which students do not have access and what the service options are for these students.

September is Digital Equity Month. This awareness campaign seeks to accelerate the collection of data about student home access to devices and the internet. Digital Equity Outreach Month is a nationwide effort by school districts and state departments of education to connect with families, understand their home reliable Internet access needs, and gather the data they need to close the digital divide.

The question of reliable student home access to the Internet has become critical for schools as they plan strategies for continuous learning. Schools have varying levels of confidence in their understanding of the true levels of access to the Internet their students have. This is partially due to the fact that this information is often collected via home surveys which may be anonymous or response rates are so low that they are not representative of the school or district population. Additionally, because of the inherently technical nature of questions surrounding Internet access, the answers families provide may not be entirely accurate. Many districts have been working to gather information on student home Internet access already as part of your registration and enrollment processes for the 2020-21 school year.

This information collected will enable education leaders to:

- Understand the impact that home digital access has on learning outcomes
- Target resources to students in need of access
- Determine the most effective connectivity solutions
- Assess options for state and federal funding to close the digital access (Homework) gap
- Meet emerging CARES Act federal reporting requirements

Survey Question	Response Options
Can the student access the internet on their primary learning device at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No - Not Available</li> <li>• No - Not Affordable</li> <li>• No - Other</li> </ul>
What is the primary type of internet service used at the residence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ResidentialBroadband (e.g., DSL, Cable, Fiber)</li> <li>• CellularNetwork</li> <li>• SchoolProvidedHotSpot</li> <li>• Satellite</li> <li>• Dial-up</li> <li>• Other</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>
Can the student stream a video on their primary learning device without interruption?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes - No issues</li> <li>• Yes - But not consistent</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
What device does the student most often use to complete school work at home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desktop/Laptop</li> <li>• Tablet</li> <li>• Chromebook</li> <li>• SmartPhone</li> <li>• None</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
Is the primary learning device a personal device or school-provided? Is the primary learning device shared with anyone else in the household?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal - Dedicated (one person per machine)</li> <li>• Personal - Shared (sharing among others in household)</li> <li>• School Provided - Dedicated</li> <li>• School Provided - Shared</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>



## Present

Attendance taking has four basic purposes: allocating funding, triggering additional support, meeting compliance requirements for compulsory education, and informing program and policy decisions (Attendance Works, 2020). Attendance taking is also required by state statute (NRS 79-205) and regulation ([NDE Rule 2](#)).

### Additional terms for “attendance” during remote learning:

<b>Contact</b>	Working contact information exists for each enrolled student and their family.
<b>Connectivity</b>	Students and families have access to technology (computer, software, and internet access) and school staff are equipped to support digital literacy.
<b>Engagement</b>	Students and families are offered and respond to activities that build relationships and support social, emotional, and physical wellness.
<b>Participation</b>	The extent to which students attend class and complete learning activities.

(Source: [Attendance Works, 2020](#))

Provide Flexibility for Virtual Learning and Attendance Taking

**Title 92, Chapter 2 - Nebraska’s Uniform System of Accounting** outlines the following about attendance:

*006.02 Attendance. Students shall be counted in attendance when they are present on days when school is in session. A student shall be counted present only when he or she is actually at the school or is present at a school sponsored activity which is supervised by a member or members of the school staff. This may include **authorized independent study**, work-study programs, field trips, athletic contests, music festivals, student conventions, **instruction for homebound students**, or **similar activities when officially authorized under policies of the local school board**. It does not include “making up” school-work at home or activities supervised or sponsored by private individuals or groups.*

As the bolded text indicates, school boards have significant flexibility to design attendance policies given their specific contexts. Students who remain home due to safety concerns but still receive services may be considered in attendance if the district develops and implements a policy describing specifically how it is that attendance will be determined. For more information, see [“Considerations for Attendance”](#)

Attendance policies typically focus on if a student is present for class, not if they are engaged in the teaching and learning. When a student is present but disengaged in the learning, the teacher addresses the disengagement in various ways. The same should be true for virtual learning, though the engagement strategies might be different.

For example, if a student learning remotely is connected via their online platform, but is not engaging in the learning, this is not a question of attendance but rather engagement. Schools must seek to understand the barriers for this student's engagement. For example:

- Is the learning meaningful and relevant to the student?
- Are there auditory or visual supports the child may need?
- Are language or other learning supports needed to better serve the child?
- Have we asked the student why they're disengaged?

## **Proactively Address Student Disengagement and Absenteeism**

Schools should carefully examine data from the 2019-20 school year to identify students who were struggling with attendance issues pre-pandemic. Unfortunately, students who were chronically absent the year before, are likely to be chronically absent this year. Targeting interventions through a **multi-tiered strategy**, whether in-person or virtually, may lead to improved attendance and engagement.

Attendance Works and FutureEd updated their attendance playbook for educators to offer ideas for how to encourage and track attendance in remote learning environments, as well as ways to provide supports to families and communities. The playbook also offers different tiers of interventions that can be used to ensure educators meet the needs of students and families. More information can be found: <https://www.future-ed.org/attendance-playbook/>.

Additional resources for Attendance Awareness Month have been created to account for the unique situation of multiple learning modalities. Information and printable handouts can be found here: <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/>.



## **Engaged**

### **Student Engagement**

Educators can consider ways of integrating into their units and lessons authentic opportunities to help students make meaning of and process this moment in time (i.e., pandemic, protest movement against systemic racism). For example, consider assigning journaling as a daily activity; analyze COVID-19 data sets in mathematics; read COVID-19-related articles in science; read criminal justice-related articles in social studies. More information can be found here: [Teaching and Learning in the 2020-2021 School Year: Instructional Materials and Instruction](#).

### **Parent and Family Engagement**

Authentic, rich communication with families is another method for keeping students engaged. TNTP provides a model called “360 Degree Communication.” Authentic engagement rests on four ideas:

<b>Shared Vision</b>	Work with stakeholders to develop a common vision for student success
<b>Authentic Collaboration</b>	Share resources and data to help families and community organizations support student learning
<b>Intentional Culture &amp; Diversity</b>	Build trust by addressing bias and understanding the unique community context.
<b>360-Degree Communication</b>	Prioritize ongoing communication and transparency and develop a healthy feedback loop.



Type of Communication	Process	Examples
<b>One-Way Communication</b>	Sender → Message → Receiver	Monday Memo, Newsletters, social media posts
<b>Two-Way Communication</b>	Sender → Message → Receiver → Feedback → Sender...	Meet the teacher night, video chat, web forum
<b>360 degree Communication</b>	Build trust with stakeholders → Seek feedback from diverse array of stakeholders → Analyze feedback trends and share with stakeholders → Incorporate feedback into decision making → Help stakeholders understand how their feedback was used → Build trust...	Organization creates space for family discussions, and the org listens to the family, seeking to understand their perspective and engage them in building solutions. Next, they implement strategies based on learnings and conduct future checks.

Source: More information can be found [here](#) and by exploring TNTP's parent and community engagement pages, <https://tntp.org/covid-19-school-response-toolkit/view/engaging-families-and-community-partners-in-reopening-efforts>.

A step by step planning guide was developed by NDE and partners outlining planning, implementation, and sustaining steps for engagement. This document, titled "Teaching and Learning in the 2020-21 School Year: Student, Family, and Community Engagement". This resource can be found here: <https://www.launchne.com/continuity-of-learning/instruction/district/>.

For both parents and students, building trust is foundational to engagement. The process through which we develop trust is knowing what's expected, following through with it, and making sure that channels are open so that disconnects can be addressed. Panorama Education provides resources for building belonging and relationships with students and families in a virtual space. Find out more here: <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/8-strategies-sense-of-belonging-virtually>.



## **Supported**

Whether learning is taking place in person or remotely, connecting with students and supporting them is critical.

The Launch NE webpage contains more comprehensive resources on engagement strategies and student wellness:

- "Teaching and Learning in the 2020-21 School Year: Student, Family, and Community Engagement."
- "Teaching and Learning in the 2020-21 School Year: Wellbeing and Connection"

Access these and more resources here: <https://www.launchne.com/continuity-of-learning/instruction/district/>.

Panorama Education provides several resources in their social emotional learning toolkit. Find out more here: <https://go.panoramaed.com/adult-sel-social-emotional-learning-toolkit>.

The wellness of educators is just as important! The strain on teachers and leaders is already great, but with the added pressures of a pandemic and increased attention to racial and social injustices, adult well-being is paramount. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides countless resources for adult SEL competencies and capacity building. Their resources are found here: <https://drc.casel.org/strengthen-adult-sel-competencies-and-capacity/strengthening-adult-sel-and-cultural-competence/>.

ESUs have curated thousands of resources to support virtual and hybrid learning including ed-tech Tools, remote learning plans, student mental wellness protocols, and tips and tricks for parents. More information here: <https://www.esucc.org/digital-learning/>.

Parents, families, and providers are often serving the dual role of caregiver and supervisor of virtual learning. EduTopia provides resources for educators to support at home learning by defining the role of parents, communicating learning goals, providing resources to parents, and encouraging flexibility. Find out more here: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-coach-parents-who-are-teaching-home>.





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