

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and Advice

Why has RUSD decided to provide a blend of asynchronous and synchronous instruction, rather than a full day of live streaming synchronous instruction?

RUSD teachers and administration, supported by the Board of Trustees, considered several factors prior to the implementation of the Continuity Learning Plan to determine how content would be delivered in the most purposeful and effective way during distance learning. The decision to not facilitate a full day of live streaming lessons to students for an extended period of time was made intentionally to further our commitment to equity and access to high-impact, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for all students. Requiring students to be present at a specific time for a significant portion of the day to participate in live lessons does not serve students equally and does not align with current models of quality teaching and learning.

Our plan has been designed to provide flexibility for family schedules and is purposefully sensitive to inconsistent student access such as parent availability for support, number of siblings, family structures, and internet functionality. Additionally, to protect student privacy, live streaming sessions are not recorded for review at a later time. To ensure all students have equal and complete access to the most appropriate instruction, a blend of asynchronous and synchronous instruction is the basis of our program.

What is the difference between asynchronous (pre-recorded) instruction and synchronous (live streaming) instruction?

Asynchronous instruction primarily comes in the form of teacher-created videos, podcasts or recordings in learning apps. Asynchronous instruction provides a reliable, equitable student experience, while also avoiding lost instruction time caused by environmental and technological issues (slow WIFI or other technical issues, interrupting siblings or classmates, the need for parental assistance at a specific time, etc.).

Benefits of Asynchronous instruction:

- Each student can watch at a time and location that is most conducive to their individual learning
- Each student can adjust the speed of content to match their needs (pause and rewind) to avoid missed learning and ensure comprehension
- Each student can reference the content when needed to clarify questions and strengthen learning
- Each student can experience the lesson at their own pace, without classmate interruptions (no classroom management concerns or repetition of content when it is not needed)
- Parents, who may need to help or support a student, will be able to review the content on an as needed basis at their own pace

Synchronous learning primarily comes in the form of live streaming class instruction or meetings, using Google Meets, which may include the full-class, small group or one-on-one meetings, and office hours. Synchronous platforms provide the social connection and real-time feedback necessary to ensure student well-being, engagement, and support.

Benefits of Synchronous instruction:

- Each student can interact with teachers and classmates, providing a valuable social-emotional connection
- Each student can ask questions in real-time to clarify assignments and instruction

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- Each student can collaborate with other students, learning how to communicate and listen in an online environment

How much time will teachers be spending in synchronous live meetings with students?

Teachers have planned up to 4 hours of synchronous live meetings per week with students based on grade level and subject. When meeting with large groups, including the full class, teachers are primarily using the live streaming format for an introduction of assignments, checking for understanding, asking questions to solicit feedback, and engaging students in opportunities to further their connections and social-emotional experiences. Additionally, teachers and specialists are scheduling live meetings with smaller groups of students to provide more hands-on and interactive opportunities.

It is important to recognize that managing the classroom in a live streaming environment can be more challenging than in the physical classroom, due to varying home structures and schedules. Teachers will set expectations for behavioral rules and protocols that students need to follow at the beginning of the meeting. However, facilitating connectivity issues, managing disruptions, and engaging student participation, can be challenging, especially when attempting to instruct and deliver content. For these reasons, our teachers have planned different types of activities for large group versus small group meetings.

In addition to live meetings with their students, all RUSD teachers are engaged in daily collaborative meetings with their grade-level teams, and teacher leaders meet separately with principals and other leadership. When they are not meeting and planning, they are engaged in professional development activities that include exploring best practices, researching resources, learning new tools, reviewing student work, and providing feedback.

Is it possible for our distance learning program to follow a typical school day schedule from 8:30am - 3:00pm?

Yes, following a typical schedule may be very helpful during distance learning. RUSD has provided a sample schedule for your students to follow, which can be found here for [Reed](#), [Bel Aire](#), and [Del Mar](#). It is important to remember that in a distance learning model, a typical schedule can be more flexible, and we have learned that students may need to take more frequent breaks. Additionally, working and learning from home provides new challenges and distractions that are not found in the classroom. Therefore, we do not have a required schedule for students to follow, rather we have provided an example, or a guideline. The curriculum provided in the Continuity Learning Plan is designed to engage students in core academic learning during a portion of their day, in addition to physical education and optional extension activities that can provide lessons for the length of a typical school day. Please remember that during a regular school day students take breaks for lunch and recess that are included into the normal school day schedule.

Why has RUSD implemented Elementary Specialist Wednesdays?

Elementary Specialist Wednesday is designed for our specialist instructors to interact with and engage students in PE, music, Spanish, library and art. As we have observed throughout this distance learning period, students have not been spending as much time on specialist curriculum, so focusing all specialist activities in a single day allows for more focus. We also wanted to provide an opportunity for students within the same family to engage in specialist activities together, if desired. Of course, while these lessons and activities could be fun for the

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whole family, your child should be able to complete most lessons independently. PE will also be included on additional days of the week across the schools. This is an effort to underscore the importance of daily movement. During this time, many of us are more inclined to lead more sedentary, device-dependent lives. Physical exercise is important for our physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Elementary teachers participate in professional development on Wednesdays. The new schedule provides much-needed time to research, explore, and learn new tools and best practices to support distance learning and instruction. Teachers participate in practical professional development opportunities, including learning about and practicing new tools so that students will benefit from more opportunities to connect with their teachers and with each other. As is always the case when we learn new skills, teachers (like all of us) experience different learning curves. Some teachers may feel prepared to roll out new tools immediately, and some prefer a little extra time to practice new skills. We appreciate your patience and understanding as we all redefine our models, learn new skills, take risks, and implement new practices.

How are teachers monitoring student engagement?

Teachers are keeping a record of student activity in a variety of ways. This includes email exchanges, virtual check-ins, reviewing progress completed on online apps, as well as reviewing work submitted electronically. Teachers will connect directly with students and families if they notice an absence of student activity.

What if my student needs more, or our family needs less?

In a traditional classroom setting, teachers are able to monitor individual needs in real-time. We understand that a large part of that responsibility has necessarily shifted to parents. For students looking for more, grade level teams have provided additional, optional activities in the daily learning plan. For students and families feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work, please remember that students are expected to complete core subjects each day. While our hope is that students are able to experience the wide breadth of activities offered, we also understand that families may need to make some choices to make the learning experience manageable. For additional assistance, please ask your teacher for specific guidance.

This new model of distance learning can be challenging for families. Here are some resources for parents.

[7 Guiding Principles for Parents Teaching From Home](#) ~ Edutopia

Coping During Covid-19, Resources for Parents ~ Child Mind Institute

Support Behaviors First

One thing we are noticing is that parents are suddenly in on a secret that generally shocks all first-year teachers. It turns out that a teacher's priority is generally not delivering content to kids. The majority of a classroom teacher's focus is directed toward managing behaviors first. It's about creating systems and routines and it's supporting kids emotionally so they can learn. And now you, the parents, are in charge of cultivating these things in your own homes.

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We offer a short summary of classroom management 101 below, and we share these as “best practices” understanding that they won’t work in all homes, and that every family situation is different. We also understand that it feels like we "don't have time" for the suggested activities below. We know that a little investment in these things up front will save a lot of time in the long run.

Consider a Schedule

Most kids thrive on consistency. Many RUSD students are used to seeing their daily schedule on the board every day. Consider creating a family schedule with each child’s daily schedule, as well as the parent’s schedules. Add a note on the schedule when each person has an online meeting, and schedule when parents are available for assistance. Add in breaks throughout the day as well. Or consider using the sample distance learning schedule that we have created for your school, which can be found here for [Reed](#), [Bel Aire](#), and [Del Mar](#).

Keep Sessions Short and Manageable

Consider using a timer that your child can operate.

Set Agreements & Stick to Them

Work with your child to set simple, daily expectations and agreements. Consider a behavior or sticker chart for motivation and tracking. Other than necessary fine-tuning, do not make changes.

Be Fair, Be Strong, and Be Consistent

The more consistent you are, the fewer questions you will receive, and the less they will rely on you for guidance! Students thrive with routines and schedules set in place.

Slow Down & Reset if Necessary

Sometimes we have to pause all academics and revisit expectations, refine agreements, and re-establish routines.

Be Flexible

Understand that even the best plan will need to change based upon the day, the child, the assignment, and even the weather. Not only do you have our permission, but you have our encouragement to make changes to make things manageable. If you’re not sure how to make these decisions, contact your teacher directly.

Set Small Goals & Celebrate

Focus on what has been challenging in your household and set a small goal around that challenge. Start small by making it a daily goal, and eventually work your way up to a weekly goal. Celebrate when goals have been achieved by playing a special game as a family or having one-on-one time together.

Practice Kindness

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This is critical. Be kind to yourself and to others. All of us are in a stressful situation without precedent or preparation. We are all doing the best we can, and we need to assume goodwill and shift some expectations. Talk with your children about what challenges you might be experiencing in your own work and let them know how you have persevered through kindness. Model that being kind to yourself and to others means to step back and remind ourselves that we are all doing the best we can.