



MONTANA RURAL SCHOOLS INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND STUDENTS

Online teaching and learning is introducing new challenges for administrators, teachers, parents, and students across Montana. To meet these challenges, the University of Montana's Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development offers the following creative solutions being used by Montana schools to foster student learning, support families, and capitalize on opportunities to build relationships with families who have been difficult to reach.

Addressing Family and Community Needs

School staff should view themselves as connectors: connecting students to learning and fun, connecting guardians to academic and parenting resources, and connecting parents to one another. In rural Montana, families may be more isolated now and cut off from important support systems.

Many local schools and communities are forming a team consisting of staff from the health department, food bank, grocery store, business owners, and hospitals to identify current needs and provide support. Teams are organizing food drives, establishing help hotlines, identifying potential hot spots for students without internet access, and identifying options for childcare. The following are additional examples of school/community solutions:



Helpline — One secretary is managing the school's helpline. The secretary logs all calls and refers callers to services and resources. If there are no resources, she refers the caller to the community team to problem solve.



Internet Access — One community asked residents to volunteer their hotspots for families in need. Children can sit outside the person's house and use the internet with a guest password.



Child Care — A school district is helping families to identify their social supports and develop childcare networks using one or two families that were already supporting each other.

Setting up Online Rules and Expectations

When setting up on-line learning environments, teachers and administrators should develop expectations and lessons for students. If you have a multi-tiered system of support team, have them develop school-wide online learning expectations. Provide opportunities for families to offer suggestions for expected behavior to increase their buy-in. Click the following links to see what schools have developed: [Elementary Matrix](#), [Secondary Matrix](#), [Sample Guidelines](#).

Tools for Managing Problem Behavior and Teaching Self-Regulation

Teachers and parents should set clear strategies to manage problem behavior. Aligning teacher and parent expectations help students regulate their emotions and cope with unanticipated changes. The following examples demonstrate how teachers and parents are working together to support student learning and improve behavior: [PAX Tools](#), [Taking a Break](#), [Building positive developmental online relationships](#)

Establishing Routines and Schedules

Educators know that students do better with clear routines and schedules to follow. Help your parents develop a schedule that works for their family. View a [sample schedule](#).

Attendance

Schools should evaluate attendance policies and develop strategies to address those students who are not participating in online learning. Educators should be sensitive to student and family needs when addressing attendance issues. Spotty internet service, high demand for computer time, and related technical barriers contribute to student non-participation. [This example](#) shows how one school set up a system to support students who are not participating on-line.

Check and Connect

High-risk families can struggle to meet their child's basic needs for food, adequate sleep, emotional safety, and predictable housing. These same families might be less able to ensure that their child is attending and actively participating in online learning. Click these links to see how an elementary school created a Virtual Check and Connect for their high-risk students: [Sample Check and Connect](#), [Sample Tracking Sheet](#) and [Virtual Check and Connect](#)

Mental Health Support

There will be times when educators are worried about a student's mental health. It is important to remember that your community mental health providers are working to provide tele-therapy and support. If you have CSCT or a local mental health provider, help your parents access these vital services.

Connecting with Families

Educators are known for their creativity and innovation. Check out these great ideas schools are using to connect with and support families!

Breaks — [This video](#), created by a counselor and teachers, discusses the importance of both children and adults taking breaks. Teachers talk about their own struggles managing work from home and home schooling — helping to normalize what most parents are going through.

Town Hero — One school had a staff member take pictures of parents who are continuing to work in the community and developed a slide show for their students titled "Our Town Heroes."

Parade — Schools are organizing parades where teachers drive their cars to all the student houses and wave and honk. The students love seeing their teachers!

Community Meetings — A school has community meetings once a week where the principal talks with parents and guardians about self-care, on-line support and other community resources.