WESTCHESTER
COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL

PHILOSOPHY OF VIRTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

2021-2022

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Virtual Teaching and Learning

In preparation for the school year, the faculty and administration at Westchester have developed a dynamic and robust plan for distance teaching and learning, should we need to conduct school in this manner. Using our experiences and feedback from emergency distance learning in the spring of 2020, along with extensive professional development on best practices in online instruction, and implementation of distance learning in the 2020-2021 school year, faculty and administration have developed this philosophy of virtual teaching and learning to outline what to expect should distance learning be needed in the coming school year.

In the pages that follow, you will learn more about the details of our plans for distance teaching and learning, but let's begin with a high level summary of Westchester's beliefs, values, and essential elements of our plans for instruction.

WCDS Beliefs and Values

Mission Statement: *Westchester Country Day is a college preparatory school that seeks to educate each child toward moral, academic, artistic, and athletic excellence in a nurturing, family environment where students, teachers, and parents support one another. By respecting the student and honoring learning, Westchester aims to cultivate informed citizens who are ready for a rapidly changing world and to graduate students who view the pursuit and wise use of knowledge as a lifelong joy.*

At Westchester Country Day School, the mission drives all decisions on how to best instruct students, whether online or in-person. In a distance learning environment the following beliefs and values will continue to be emphasized:

Pursuit of Excellence
As a college preparatory school that seeks to educate the "whole child," an education in moral, academic, artistic, and athletic excellence will continue to be pursued in all facets of the online educational experience.

Community and Relationships
Westchester prides itself on building a strong community in which students feel a sense of belonging. While in distance learning, positive faculty-student relationships and student collaboration will continue to be nurtured and developed.

Supportive Environment
A "family" feel is often used to describe Westchester, and that continued care and nurturing will be an integral part of any virtual learning environment. It is key that supportive partnerships are formed between students, teachers, and parents in order to ensure maximal growth in each student. Students should expect classrooms to be accepting, affirming, appropriately challenging, and supportive.

Individual Learner Needs
Faculty will seek opportunities to know and understand each student as a unique learner. By truly knowing each child, the teacher can design virtual learning opportunities that are differentiated by varying interests and abilities.

Social and Emotional Growth
Social and emotional development are essential to overall student wellness. Through opportunities in synchronous class sessions, in advisory settings, and in virtual extra-curricular environments, faculty will help students develop social

skills, such as communication and collaboration, in addition to learning how to build emotional intelligence and manage stress through techniques, such as mindfulness.

Meaningful and Joyful Learning
To pursue wise use of knowledge and a lifelong joy in the virtual classroom, students will understand the meaning behind the learning process and experience joy and excitement in learning through creative, hands-on, and appropriately challenging learning opportunities. When applicable, faculty will show how learning is interconnected to help students make meaningful connections across disciplines.

Essential Elements of Distance Learning Instruction

Organization, Planning, and Communication

It is the mission of Westchester to strive for excellence in all our pursuits, and it is no secret that any program of excellence is grounded in thoughtful, intentional planning and preparation. We aspire for a distance learning program that is highly organized, user friendly (for both student and parent), and composed of meaningful, effective learning activities. We are committed to a number of standards in this area as follows:

- A weekly summary of distance learning activities will be posted in advance of each week of instruction to allow students and parents to plan accordingly, including whether required live virtual sessions are planned.

- Detailed information about daily activities will be provided in a clear, easy to understand format using our PowerSchool platform in advance of each class session. All plans and requirements will be nested within PowerSchool for easy access.

- Deadlines for the submission of work will always be indicated and will be consistent from week to week.

Learning Activities

Westchester faculty members recognize the critical importance of designing daily distance learning activities that attract and engage our students. Targeted learning activities will provide the teacher with essential feedback to gauge student learning and determine whether additional instruction is necessary in order to attain content mastery. Our faculty also seeks to present parents with all the information and materials necessary to facilitate learning, especially for our younger students who rely on the parent support. Here are some of the characteristics of the distance learning activities Westchester will deliver:

- Learning activities will be varied and divided into short timeframes in order to stimulate interest and intellectual engagement.

- Diverse lessons will engage different learning modalities, tapping into the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile senses.

- Many of the prescribed activities will be designed to provide feedback about student progress to the teacher.

- Daily sessions will involve a blend of online activities requiring "screen time" and offline activities that do not involve the use of an online device.

- There will be regularly scheduled real-time activities that involve interaction peers and the teacher.

- Additional activities can be completed autonomously or with the support of a parent at a time that is convenient for the family.

Faculty-Student Engagement

The teaching philosophy at Westchester has long been rooted in strong faculty-student engagement. Many of us recognize that our small size offers the opportunity for frequent meaningful communication, collaboration, and personalized instruction. It also allows teachers and students to form authentic social relationships that support and enhance academic instruction. Though distance learning imposes a physical separation of student and teacher, there are powerful ways to ensure that teachers and students continue to engage. The following measures will be used to foster faculty-student engagement during distance learning.

- Courses will conduct synchronous live virtual sessions with the full class 2-4 times each week depending on the age of the students and nature of the instructional material. Lower School students can expect daily lessons or check-ins with the classroom and/or enrichment teachers.

- Smaller group break-out meetings will be used in order for teachers to provide instruction or guidance.

- Some of the web tools we use, including Zoom and Google Meet, allow teachers to move between multiple groups of students and the full class.

- During distance learning, periodic conferences will be scheduled with students and teachers, and parents will be invited to attend.

- Teachers will hold "office hours" during which students can schedule time for additional instruction, feedback, or just to talk about their experience with distance learning.

Social Education and Extracurriculars

Westchester seeks to educate the whole child; essential parts of this include socialization, peer interaction, and relationship building. Afterall, social interaction is what makes going to school a pleasure for students and teachers. During distance learning we will integrate some of the enjoyable activities that seek to foster relationships, build character, and create a sense of common purpose beyond the academic curriculum. We will do this through a number of planned programs

- Community meeting is an important part of life at Westchester for students in all three divisions. These meetings will take place in live and recorded virtual sessions so we can continue to have community announcements, recognitions, and programs of all kinds.

- Extracurricular activities and student clubs will also continue to meet during distance learning, allowing students to work together and grow in myriad ways.

- Likewise, our athletic teams will find ways to stay engaged and encourage individual or distance workouts.

- Middle School and Upper School advisory groups will maintain their normal schedule of meetings.

- Important programs offered by our school counselors and our college counselor will be rolled out on their regular schedule, keeping everyone on track for important programs that take place throughout the year.

Tools for Learning

	Tool	Description
Learning Management System	PowerSchool	Learning management system that houses class information and assignments. Grades are also located on Powerschool for middle and upper school students.
	Seesaw	Learning management application that allows the creation of interactive assignments to be completed by students.
Communication Tools	Gmail	Email platform utilized for internal and external communication by staff and students.
	PowerSchool	Learning management system that allows messages to be sent to staff, students, and parents.
Collaboration & Creation Tools	Google Docs	Online word processor that may be used to write, edit, and share documents by a single user or collaboratively with multiple users.
	Google Sheets	Online spreadsheet platform that may be used to create, edit, and share spreadsheets by a single user or collaboratively with multiple users.
	Google Slides	Online presentation platform that may be used to create, edit, and share presentations by a single user or collaboratively with multiple users.
	Google Drawings	Online drawing tool that may be used to create, edit, and share graphics by a single user or collaboratively with multiple users.
	Adobe Spark	Online design creation app. Teachers and students can create visually appealing graphics, videos, and websites.
	Seesaw	Learning management application that allows students to draw, record, and video to complete assignments.

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	Tool	Description
Formative Assessment Tools	Flipgrid	Video and text response platform. Flipgrid allows students to respond to questions through creating short videos.
	Kahoot	Game based learning platform. Teachers create games to review content with students collaboratively.
	Quizizz	Game format review application. Teachers create games to review content with students collaboratively.
Summative Assessment Tools	PowerSchool	Learning management system that allows the creation of assessments. Assessments are completed within the LMS.
Video Conferencing Tools	Google Meet	Video conferencing application that can be used for one-on-one, group, or class meetings. Google Meet allows participants to share presentations and documents during video calls.
	Zoom	Video conferencing application that can be used for one-on-one, group, or class meetings. Zoom allows participants to share presentations and documents during video calls. Zoom also allows small group collaboration through the use of breakout rooms.

Partnerships - School, Parent, and Student Roles and Responsibilities

General Expectations

Our school's goal for distance learning will be to partner with parents and students to mirror a typical in-person school day as closely as possible with high quality direct instruction from teachers who are able to guide learning and keep students on task, along with time away from the screen for students to practice, create, read and explore—"homework" reimagined. To help accomplish that goal, we have set forth the following expectations:

Expectations of Faculty/Staff

- Maintain professionalism, such as giving your best effort, designing a supportive and encouraging online class environment, being timely in communications and online presence, dressing appropriately, and attending virtual faculty meetings as scheduled.

- Teach some 'live' (synchronous) sessions using Google Meet or Zoom and some asynchronous classes in which students may collaborate or work individually to complete assignments. Office hours should be regularly scheduled throughout the week.

- Update PowerSchool weekly with assignments and gradebook entries.

- Provide explicit and clear instructions for each daily assignment, whether in a written or video format and posted on PowerSchool. Provide links to the learning activity if it requires completion in another online format, such as Seesaw or Flipgrid.

- Ensure that classes remain on the distance learning schedule and current policies around turning in work are maintained.

- Record all classes that involve direct instruction and post the lesson videos in PowerSchool for later viewing.

- Communicate often, consistently, and clearly with students and parents, which includes inviting and giving feedback to support student learning.

- Establish clear expectations on how students will be assessed.

- Connect with colleagues and share strategies that work.

Expectations of Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers

- Discuss your and school's expectations of distance learning with your student.

- Help your learner establish structured routines and manage their online learning by encouraging them to attend all classes (on time) and finish all assignments.

- Create a comfortable, distraction-free place for your children to work and attend online classes.

- Partner with your child's teachers and reach out should any challenges arise.

- Encourage your children to incorporate time for play, leisure, physical activity, and healthy breaks from schoolwork during the day, while practicing responsible social distancing.

- Check-in with your child at the beginning and end of their day to support their emotional well-being and help your child reflect on what was learned throughout the day. Reach out to the school counselor for advice should your child experience any additional emotional stress.

- Plan for your child to stay socially connected with friends, peers, and other family members through study groups, video chats, and other virtual extracurricular fun.

- Middle/Upper School:
  - Give your child independence during classes by not joining your children's online classes or being visible on your children's screens during classes.

- Lower School:
  - Take an active role in your child's learning. Assist them in logging into the device and various applications, and walk them through instructions when needed.
  - Provide feedback that will help your learner improve his/her work, but do not complete the work for your child. Remember that productive struggle is part of the learning process and helps build problem solving skills, grit, and resilience.
  - Help your child to plan and turn in their work and keep them focused and on task.

Expectations of Students

- Students should give their best effort, exhibit their best online class behavior (sit up, make sure their face is visible, and positively engage in the lesson) and attend classes regularly and on-time, health permitting.

- Students should have their camera on at all times during class unless the teacher asks or gives them permission to turn it off.

- From time to time, some classes may be videos/instructions via Seesaw or Flipgrid that need to be completed by students before their next class. Policies around turning in work will be maintained.

- Students may follow "free dress" guidelines during the distance-learning period (shoes will be optional, but no pajamas, please!).

- Stay in contact with your teachers and advisors. They will be checking their email daily during school day.

- Students should have their cell phones in a different room during class time.

- Abide by our Acceptable Use of Technology Contract regarding use of the school-provided device.

- Check email daily. Respond to emails from your teachers.

- Students should not share virtual class links with anyone or invite a non-WCDS student into a virtual classroom.

Lesson Plan Templates & Schedules

Lower School

Lower School faculty will use the following [lesson plan template](#) to maintain consistency across grade levels and help parents facilitate learning opportunities from home.

Based on best practices for online instruction and keeping in line with our school accrediting agency's (SAIS) expectations, students in Lower School will be expected to engage in learning for the amount of time listed below.

Grade Level	**Daily** time expectation for at-home learning in Language Arts and Math	**Weekly** time expectation for at-home learning in Science and Social Studies	**Minimum Daily** time expectation for Enrichment in Art, Music, Spanish, Mandarin, Technology, Library, Science Lab.	Activities that are not time bound for all age-levels
Pre-K	45 minutes	30 minutes	30 minutes	● Daily reading (student independent reading or parent reading to child)
Kindergarten	1 hour	1 hour		
1st Grade	1 hour 30 minutes	1 hour		● Physical fitness and wellness (Goal is to have 30-60 minutes of activity daily)
2nd Grade	2 hours	1 hour 30 minutes		● Additional family enrichment opportunities in the following disciplines: Art, Music, Spanish, Mandarin, Technology, Library, Science Lab, and social-emotional learning.
3rd Grade	2 hours	1 hour 30 minutes		
4th Grade	2 hours	1 hour 30 minutes		
5th Grade	2 hours - 2 hours 30 minutes	2 hours		

These time expectations will include a balance of on-screen and off-screen learning with live daily check-ins and/or lessons by classroom teachers. Lower School classroom teachers will survey the needs of each family to design a schedule for synchronous sessions that accommodates the class. Schedules will be communicated across grade levels to try to coordinate for families with multiple children in Lower School. An enrichment schedule will be designed to give students at least one 30-minute synchronous session daily, such as in Art, Music, Spanish, Mandarin, Technology, Library, P.E. and Science Lab. A schedule for synchronous sessions will be posted at the beginning of each week for families to plan accordingly. Lessons will be recorded and posted on Powerschool for students to view at a later time if they are not able to attend the live session.

An example of a typical day may look like the following:

Early Childhood Daily Schedule (PreK-1st Grade)

Upper Elementary Daily Schedule (2nd-5th Grade)

Middle School and Upper School

The following Middle and Upper School schedules were designed with overall student academic needs and social-emotional wellness in mind. Advisory, breaks between classes, an extended lunch period, and office hours for students to check-in with teachers and ask questions have all been integrated into the weekly schedule. The goal of this schedule is to allow for a more balanced approach to learning.

Middle School

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:45-8:55	(MS) CMM		(MS) CMM		(MS/US) CMM
9:00-9:50	1	6	3	7	4
9:50-10:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
10:00-10:50	2	7	4	1	5
10:50-11:20	Advisory	Elective/Club	Office Hours	Advisory	Elective/Club
11:20-12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:00-12:50	3	1	5	2	6
12:50-1:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
1:00-1:50	4	2	6	3	7
1:50-2:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
2:00-2:50	5	Office Hours	Meetings	Office Hours	Faculty Meetings

Upper School

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:45-8:55					(US) CMM
9:00-9:50	1	6	3	7	4
9:50-10:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
10:00-10:50	2	7	4	1	5
10:50-11:20	Club Meetings	Club Meetings	Office Hours	Advisory	Club Meetings
11:20-12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:00-12:50	3	1	5	2	6
12:50-1:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
1:00-1:50	4	2	6	3	7
1:50-2:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
2:00-2:50	5	Office Hours	Club Meetings	Office Hours	Faculty Meetings

Supporting Students with Learning Differences

The "Supporting Students with Learning Differences During Distance Learning" document will provide teachers, families, and students with a variety of resources and ideas that will support students with learning differences should the school be in a distance learning scenario. The use of those suggestions and/or tools will be most successful when there is ongoing communication, collaboration and flexibility among all parties involved. Each Division Head and their assigned Academic Learning Support Specialist will create an individualized plan in order to meet the needs of each student.

Supporting Students with Learning Differences During Distance Learning

Examples - Learning Contracts and Schedules

Middle School Distance Learning Check-In to Support Struggling Students Procedures

10 Best Practices in Distance Learning Pedagogy (for Faculty)

1. *Maintain Consistency* - Faculty should utilize the same learning platform (PowerSchool) so that all students and parents know where to find assignments. PowerSchool pages should be easy to navigate; it should be clear where to locate learning objectives, assignments, and learning tools. Providing a weekly outline at the beginning of the week and then posting daily assignments at the same time each day gives families an opportunity to plan and know exactly what to expect.

2. *Know Your Learners* - Each learner is unique in their identity, strength, and needs. Provide learning opportunities within a student's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky describes ZPD as the range in which a student is ready to learn independently and with the appropriate amount of support. Ongoing assessments help determine a student's readiness level and encourage faculty to design appropriate entry points to make learning accessible to all. Scaffolding tools, such as Google Chrome extensions that read-aloud or provide speech-to-text (STT) to name a few, give support to make learning accessible and help learners reach their potential. Pedagogical techniques such as differentiation, tiered assignments, and choice boards are all excellent ways to reach your learners where they are academically.

3. ***Set Clear Learning Goals*** - What do you want students to accomplish? What is the purpose or audience for their work? What should they create to show that they understand? How will their work be assessed? All activities/assignments should be tied to the learning goal so students and parents understand the meaning behind the work. In your planning, it is best to start with the "why," and that will help you develop learning opportunities that are outcomes-based and lead to tangible products/performances that are created for a targeted audience.

4. ***Be Communicative*** - Be responsive to concerns, meet regularly about needs, listen to and provide feedback. It is good practice to survey your students or parents to ask how things are going, and remain flexible in order to meet the needs of your students.

5. ***Show Your Presence Daily*** - This can occur in a variety of formats, whether through live interactions in synchronous classes, providing feedback on assignments, phone calls or emails, social interactions, or asynchronous video lessons. Set regular office hours to let students and parents know when you are available to meet and provide support. Students should feel you are easily accessible during the school day.

6. ***Use Assessments to Drive Instruction*** - Don't give assignments merely to give a grade; use assessments as tools to determine what to teach next. Allow students to take responsibility in the learning process by utilizing self-assessments. At the end of a unit of study, summative assessments that are more project based, application and/or analysis based will illuminate what a student truly understands more so than knowledge-based questions on a multiple-choice assessment.

7. ***Fill the Role of "Curator"*** - Instead of being the "imparter of knowledge," a strong online instructor fills the role of "teacher as a curator," one who designs learning experiences that are deeply personal to the student. As Dewey says, "No book or map is a substitute for personal experience; they cannot take the place of the actual journey." Take the students on an educational journey online, whether through playlists, virtual field trips, and/or designing opportunities for students to leave the computer screen to practice a skill or explore outside. A proficient "curator" is comfortable in their asynchronous design, where more responsibility is put on students to self-create and be navigators in their learning journey. Varying instructional delivery, such as whole group, small group, individual work, synchronous, and asynchronous sessions will help create a balanced learning experience for all.

8. ***Provide Student Agency*** - Give students a voice and choice in what and how they learn. Successful online learning environments thrive when students have

some autonomy in the learning process. Personalization of learning and allowing students to have self-direction on their learning journey are key strategies for engaging learners.

9. ***Determine What is Essential to Learn*** - Online environments do not allow for the same amount of time as in face-to-face teaching. As a result, what can you let go? How can you redesign your unit of study so students still gain essential understanding? Look at the curriculum map to decide what is most meaningful and relevant to learn. Or, better yet, collaborate with your colleagues to see how your curriculum coordinates with other disciplines to make learning more interconnected and solidified.

10. ***Engage the Learner*** - Emotions are the gateway to cognition and learning. Joy, excitement, surprise, empathy, and personal relevance are emotions that lead to more effective learning and long-term memory. Build time for social-emotional learning (SEL) to bring a sense of community, belonging, and connectedness to the virtual classroom. Having fun is contagious! Students will pick up on your passions and excitement for learning, and in turn, they will have fun learning too!

Who to Contact

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