Attendance and Grading – by Dr. Erin Wilcox

Attendance

As online teaching turns from a few weeks to a few months, schools are asking *What about attendance? What about Grading? Are we going to be responsible for those?* The answer is, it is not clear yet. Ultimately states may waive some or all of those requirements but we don't know exactly how that will look, at this point. Even if they do, for state or federal requirements, ACSI is suggesting that Christian schools develop a system, schoolwide, and stick with that system so that they can show their states that they required all students to attend school. Advice from our in-house counsel is "In the face of attendance laws that might not be waived until after the school year, prudence dictates we still capture attendance in the meantime. Attendance also helps make the case that you are providing an educational product to your families and helps hold students and families accountable."

When reading through the guidance of lawyers from NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools), they said it this way, "Document, document, document!"

Even if the state doesn't end up requiring proof of attendance, it is a helpful way to track students who are connecting and those who are not. A follow-up call or e-mail to those students less engaged would be very valuable when demonstrating to parents that **the school is fulfilling its contract to provide the education it promised**. One of the biggest pitfalls for students new to online learning is procrastination. Daily checks will provide attendance records, but it also provides accountability and hopefully steps toward success.

What are some practical ways to collect attendance?

1. Some LMS (Learning Management Systems) are set up to collect that information. Moodle, Google Classroom, etc. have some of those features. Still other applications like EdPuzzle, ClassDoJo, and EdModo have aspects that can be easily used for tracking students' connection or attendance. Teachers have commented that while they feel responsible to track attendance, their main focus is to be sure all students are able to access the online instruction and to know which students are engaging appropriately.
2. If you are using other applications, set up a short assignment (similar to bellwork in the brick and mortar classroom) that checks that students received their work for the day, and accomplished at least one major objective from the day before. That may seem simple, yet it helps keep students on track. You may also pick up on which students are struggling. Even teachers of young children have mentioned using programs like Seesaw to set up those short daily assignments to touch base with students.
3. Some classes have at least one synchronous touchpoint every day (like a Zoom meeting or Google Hangout). For those classes, students may have to show up and stay engaged over the course of the class period to be counted in attendance.
4. For other schools, students have to turn in at least one assignment each day in some subject. That could be from at least one of their core classes. As long as the expectation is clear, students know that they can work on several assignments for one subject one day and several assignments for another class another day. They have some choices in how they structure their

time in an asynchronous environment. However, the bottom line may be…at least one assignment is turned in for at least one class a day, or something similar.

5. Finally, students with more limited Internet access may complete a physical journal or a form (like Google Forms or Formstack) that asks what work they completed each week. They could be responsible for listing what they did, and what they completed, each day there wasn't a live session.

The following are two ideas teachers supplied to ways that they use technology to help them keep track of attendance in Google Classroom. (taken from the Facebook resource below)

- One teacher writes that he collects attendance in a <u>Google Sheet from a Google Meet</u>. When in Meet, select the extension Icon. Click the plus button to create a Google Sheet to take the attendance to. When in a Meet, click People and attendance will automatically be taken, and placed in the Spreadsheet.

- Another teacher made a <u>video on how he uses Google Sheets</u> to keep track of the type of interactions he has daily with his students.

https://www.loom.com/share/dfff00488dab4c6caec2effea62e7cda

Grading

Grading seems to be even more complicated than attendance. It seems that some schools have asked teachers to do very little or no grading. Others have gone to a Pass/Fail system, and others are continuing on with the same systems they employed in the brick and mortar classroom. Pass/Fail may send the wrong message to some. It may heighten anxiety for others. Giving no grades may send a poor message to students de-motivating them from even completing the work at all.

It is important to review the purposes of grading when deciding how to use it in this new environment. From a parent's perspective, grading is a reflection of how their son or daughter is doing in a course. It is a measure of progress or mastery of the material. They want that feedback. For the student, it may be a means of motivation, to push them to complete assignments and do their best on tests and other summative measures. For colleges, universities and other programs such as scholarships, grades are often a means of comparing students' performance relative to others. Given the challenging conditions of the delivery system during this time, schools may need to realize that not all students have the same advantages or supports at home that they normally would have had. They need to take that into account, especially in the grades that compare students and affect their futures. (Sawchuk, 2020)

Here are some principles and practices that might serve you well in this new environment. (Wilcox, 2020)

Three principles:

- Grades should be used to help teachers evaluate who is learning what, and to help continuously adjust the teaching/learning cycle, regardless of the delivery system used.
- Students do need to be held accountable for their learning. It is their job to master the content/skills and prepare themselves for the next grade or level of learning.
- Parents need to assist in the process of assessment by supervising some assessments. However, <u>keep the number to a minimum</u> that they have to supervise (such as chapter or unit tests).

Seven practices:

- Spotcheck, don't try to check every question or every piece of work. In class you might have graded every assignment. Online, you may switch to some assignments where students grade their own and report their scores. Or, they only send in one or two problems as examples of their work, just enough to spot who is struggling. Cut down on the daily grading. Don't tell them ahead of time which items you will be asking for. Parents of elementary students can take a picture with their phones of students completing a handwritten story, a math problem, or other types of work and send those in to the teacher periodically. They can also tape the student reading so that the teacher can stay abreast with the student's progress.
- Personalize the assignment. Instead of answers they can look up on Google, change the question to an interview between the student and the historical figure, for example. Pose a creative, hypothetical question instead of something easy to look up online.
- Use student portfolios. Items can be created/organized on the outline of the learning objectives of the unit. Students may have choices on how they show mastery of the objectives. Require a final integrative paper or multi-media presentation as they tie their learning together. Grade only the final product with an A, B, C, etc. with the rest of the items receiving a completion grade. This will allow you to use fewer pencil/paper tests but still accomplish your curricular objectives. Presentations done with PowerPoint can be narrated with the student's voice.
- Use tracking (for writing) in collaborative programs like Google Docs. Grade only the final product. Be sure to use programs like Turn-it-in.com to check for plagiarism.
- Test students in smaller groups with video conferencing (like Zoom) with the help of a Teacher Aide. Some Teacher Aides need additional responsibilities to be paid for working, and they can assist with this monitoring. Remember to use multiple versions of a test, use more short answer or essay, more open book tests, etc. to minimize those who might still try to cheat.
- Software such as Google Forms or Go Guardian have ability to lock screens. This can help if you still wish to use modified tests. (See suggestions for tests above.)
- Use a program like Education Perfect (and others) which have learning sequences and assessments included. Many programs have been opened up and are now **free** which are normally for a fee or paid subscription.

Each class, each level, and ultimately each school will have to determine what works for them, with a primary focus on evaluating which content students have mastered. We hope that these principles and practices will help you think through these issues and come up with the best plan for your school.

Resources:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/Temporaryschoolclosuresupport/ (Facebook page dedicated to teachers teaching in this temporary online instruction environment) If you are interested in a specific topic, like "attendance," type it into the search bar.

Wilcox, E., (2020) *Assessment of Online Instruction* – a PowerPoint Presentation posted on the Coronavirus Resource Page; https://community.acsi.org/coronavirusresources/home

Sawchuk, S., *Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What's the Right Call?* Edweek.org; Education Week, April 6, 2020