



**NYU | STEINHARDT**

**GUIDANCE ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-  
SUSTAINING REMOTE EDUCATION**  
**Centering Equity, Access, and Educational Justice**

**METROPOLITAN CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EQUITY  
AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOLS**

**Dr. David E. Kirkland**  
Executive Director

# Guidance on Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Remote Education

## Centering Equity, Access, and Educational Justice

By NYU Metro Center

More than 45 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have temporarily closed school buildings and turned to remote education to continue the important work of teaching and learning. We applaud students, families, education professionals, and administrators who are adopting new technology, innovative skills, and strategic processes to lessen the impact on our children's education during this challenging time. We must, however, ask: **how can we continue to center equity and culturally responsive-sustaining education as teaching and learning moves online?**

At NYU Metro Center, we want to provide those involved with the education of our children the support they will need to answer this question and others related to it as we all navigate the rapidly changing set of circumstances brought about by COVID-19. Our team of educational equity experts remain available to help. This resource document, while not comprehensive but fluid, is meant to provide guidance and answers to questions and concerns related to high-leverage teaching and learning practices for equity-based remote education. We know that school closings and event cancellations are impacting human connections, that we need different strategies for coming together, communicating, and achieving equity in education during this unique moment. For those of you currently relying on our services, we hope that this guidance document can assist you with ideas and equity insights, regardless the situation.

With hundreds of thousands of educators and parents working from home, this is a moment to think differently, consider new ideas, and pivot resources. Over the weeks to come, our country will be connecting in ways far different than ever before—searching online for information, reading emails, attending virtual meetings, and sharing ideas via social media. We, at NYU Metro Center, do not want the question of equity to be sidelined, overlooked, or pressed to the margins, as we know vulnerable people are usually those most impacted by major crises. For more than 40 years, NYU Metro Center has been a leading voice in pushing a commitment to the vulnerable, partnering with organizations to reduce inequity, working diligently with allies and friends to promote equity in education and beyond it. We hope that this document will support some of your critical educational needs and empower you to empower our young people as we cling to the lasting resilience of the human spirit to overcome this latest challenge.

### **What is culturally responsive-sustaining remote education?**

Culturally responsive-sustaining remote education grounds the use of education tools and arranges the educational experience in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability) are recognized and regarded as assets for teaching and learning. Thus, it is education that is responsive to students' individual and collective lived experiences, and in particular during this time, their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. It does the following:

- makes education accessible to all students;
- is co-constructed by students, families, community, and schools;
- affirms racial and cultural identities to foster positive academic outcomes;
- develops students' abilities to connect across cultures;
- empowers students as agents in their own teaching and learning;
- anticipates and designs the education experience around and in response to particular social and cultural differences, and
- contributes to an individual's engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of meaningfully relevant conversations, activities, and engagements.

One of the missions of culturally responsive-sustaining remote education is that students and teachers become aware of, study, and challenge inequities, as both outgrowths of remote education and features of it. Culturally responsive-sustaining remote education promotes sociopolitical and health agency for students and their families but is also exciting and joyful for students who are *seen* and *loved* and therefore can take ownership for their learning.

**What does culturally responsive-sustaining remote education look like?**

Culturally responsive-sustaining remote education uses tools and situations fitted to the unique needs of particular young people. Thus, it will look different in different homes, with crisscrossing points of intersection and fleeting points of divergence. It begins with fostering conversations with students—about what remote education is; about the politics and reality of the moment we are facing; about resources that students can contribute to the experience; with the building of virtual communities and spaces for sharing ideas, feelings, understandings, and other valuable assets people gain from being members of communities. It plays with time and space, privileging a fluidity/flexibility that sequence synchronous and asynchronous activities in ways most responsive to the needs and capacities of students. It features educators and tools responsive to the lived realities that directly impact students’ ability to access remote learning, including WIFI access, device access, device sharing, device functionality, access to private space, access to quiet space, and considerations for additional home expectations especially caring for siblings or younger children. It is designed to meet students where they are, including on social media (e.g., Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, etc.)—if students will join lessons on Twitter chat more readily than on Google classroom, for example, then Twitter chat is where ‘schools’ should do lessons. This requires empathy interviews with students and other surveys/opportunities for students to provide on-going feedback on their digital experiences (cf. experience architecture), learning assets, desired domains of practice, and comfort navigating digital learning environments. This also requires flexibility from school/districts on rules around educators’ professional boundaries, which sometimes prohibit social media interaction, while also keeping students safe.

Culturally responsive-sustaining remote education also features flexibility that acknowledges the challenges families are facing with remote learning—multiple kids on one laptop, unstable internet connection, kids on their own at home, etc.—and allows for compassion and invention rather than standards and punishment. It features time for creativity and play incorporated into remote lessons, such as the use of digital learning simulations, video games, and other gaming platforms that invite joy into learning. It provides free and stable internet access for all families, free and easily accessible computers for each student, and a constant stream of communication from districts and schools in multiple languages and on multiple platforms—not just emails or school-based apps but also through texts, calls, social media, etc. All communication should be audio-recorded and transcribed for accessibility. Further, we note that a lot of ‘remote’ education that is taking place across the nation closely resembles homeschooling. We encourage families and educators to access the vast body of knowledge currently available on homeschooling, while also enlisting parents as partners in creating more fluid culturally responsive-sustaining remote education plans—inclusive of curriculums and daily lessons.

Culturally responsive-sustaining remote education features arts, culture, and creativity integrated throughout learning. It provides ways to assess mental, emotional and physical health of students and responds with supports or proactive designs such as digital mindfulness and mediation activities (see our list of resources below). It also offers remote systems for translation of phone calls, video conferences, online lessons, etc., while also offering free culturally responsive-sustaining texts (e.g., books, articles, poems, stories) for students for pickup at neighborhood sites or to download to their digital devices. It reconsiders the “teacher”; there are ways for families, neighbors, and community members to share their expertise and for traditional schools to provide support, drawing from the history of community education in Indigenous and Black communities and elsewhere. Learning happens outside of technology and in the community as well—through ongoing peer interactions and through things found in a student’s natural living environments (e.g., cooking becomes a site to learn science, or chemistry; family pictures become a way of thinking historically; measuring room spaces become a way of thinking mathematically and

learning geometry). Resources concentrate not on getting some students ahead but on getting the most vulnerable students access and supports for learning, making sure the basic needs of all students and their families are met (e.g. food, shelter, vision and mental health supports as prerequisite to teaching and learning).

### **What do we need to know?**

Teachers need to know . . .

- How race, ability, class, language, gender, and other systems of identity influence learning, access to learning, and how we should think about education
- How power can translate to online environments (e.g., do boys and young men take up more space than girls and young women; does instruction privilege abled persons in ways that it does not privilege otherly abled persons, etc.?)
- How to ensure full participation from all students
- How to prioritize and address the questions/doubts raised during a lesson
- How to set a structure around continuous assessment and progress monitoring
- Lesson planning effectively with others (partnering with students, parents, and other educators) which provides scope and space for online activities and remote participation
- Different students have different learning pace and requirements
- Building student morale is very important as this is new and uncharted territory for students as well
- How to use multiple online and social media platforms so they can be flexible with which ones work best for their students
- How to communicate with and build meaningful relationships with families from different racial, cultural, linguistic, ability, and class backgrounds (Teachers need to pick up the phone and call parents and students; however, they rarely feel comfortable talking one-on-one and tend to lack the relationships necessary to get a clear picture of what families need)
- How to integrate arts, culture, and creativity in their lessons
- Techniques for student-centered, independent learning
- How to adjust remote lessons plans to meet the different needs of students

Families need to know . . .

- Changing dynamics require the creation of space for students to be actively involved in remote classrooms
- How to talk to students about their concerns and doubts and help them navigate through the change including technology set-up
- How to involve themselves in some sort of physical activity with students such as yoga, painting, etc.
- How to spend more time with students (they might have a lot to talk about)
- How to access free technology, free internet, and free tech support when things break down
- How to navigate multiple online learning platforms
- How to access other crisis supports such as food pantries, rent/mortgage/utility assistance, unemployment, etc.
- Ways to support children emotionally during times of crisis
- Contact information for other families in their child's class/grade
- That they are positioned to shape their child's education (i.e., stay on top of school, remain informed, make demands in service of your child(ren)'s education, etc.)

School leaders need to know . . .

- That race, socioeconomic status, ability, language, and other social forces exacerbate inequities in terms of access to resources, opportunities, power, culturally responsive instruction, and education writ large

- How to even the playing field using targeted universal solutions that more heavily support students who require it (Hold high expectation, but also hold the ladder)
- How to provide resources necessary to ensure access to and promote teacher competence around culturally responsive-sustaining remote education
- How to manage and coordinate between separate units which are operating from remote locations
- How to oversee the quality of communications between students and the teachers
- How to ensure that community/parents needs are taken care of
- How to ensure sufficient professional development opportunity for educators to help them navigate through changes
- All the students and teachers have access to the technology and equipment
- Academic assessments are designed keeping in mind the change in nature of the delivery of instructions and settings
- How to focus more on continuous assessment, as this will enable educators to easily identify students who are struggling with the shift
- How to regularly check-in with the staff members
- All of the things under “what should teachers know,” and how to support teachers in doing those things
- Effective outreach methods to families and students outside of the standard robocalls and emails—parent networks, community organizations, social media, community leaders, religious institutions, grocery stores, etc.
- How to help students and families access free computers, internet and tech support
- How to help students and families access mental and emotional support: online therapy, meditation, relaxation, arts, recreation, etc.
- How to help families access crisis supports such as food pantries, rent/mortgage/utility assistance, unemployment, etc.
- Knowledge and relationships in the school community so they can amplify and leverage resources and supports

Students need to know . . .

- That the adults in their lives will protect them from harm as best as we can (They need to feel safe and supported)
- How to access multiple online platforms
- (For older students) Some of the same resources above (mental and emotional support, free technology and internet, food pantries, etc.)
- Contact information for at least one trusted adult in their school (or a partner community organization) who can support them
- That they are the greatest fund of knowledge during these times of online connection; that building upon their current ability to interact, communicate and learn through web-based platforms is critical

### **What should we be doing?**

Teachers should be . . .

- Getting to know students and families, what they need and want, what they possess and can contribute to continued learning experiences (Use empathy interviews and Zoom-based focus groups for participatory planning and curriculum building)
- Learning to teach students at a distance and be patient because these are challenging times for all involved
- Developing talk sessions around different religions/cultures echoing the concept of unity
- Developing talk sessions around various modern world role models

- Reaching out one-to-one to families to build the relationships that are necessary to weather challenges
- Connecting with students through platforms that students are already familiar with and asking questions to get student input
- Identifying their own biases and assumptions when it comes to remote learning, and identifying how this might affect the learning experiences of students they teach
- Requesting help when they need it, knowing that they are not alone, while also logging questions, best practices, and other insights that come up in the process of remote teaching (i.e., reflective practice)

Families should be . . .

- Keeping in mind that this time is just as stressful for the child(ren) as it is for the adults
- Building community in their apartment buildings, homes, classes, neighborhood, constituencies, etc. to provide mutual learning and support

School leaders should be . . .

- Doing their very best to mitigate the possibility for COVID-19 to proliferate (particularly when working with vulnerable communities)
- Acknowledging how COVID-19 has been racialized and surfaced racist attacks on Asian Americans, and systematically communicating that all forms of racial intolerance is unacceptable
- Contributing things to the “what school leaders need to know” list above
- Making sure the basic needs of all students and families continue to be met (e.g. providing bagged meals, as students are learning)
- Identifying their own biases and assumptions when it comes to remote learning and identifying how this might affect the learning experiences of students

Students should be . . .

- Learning in ways that are unbiased and builds on their social and cultural assets as digitally connected beings
- Engaged in meaningful experiences and conversations with peers and educators around culturally relevant academic content and materials
- Challenged in ways that match high expectations and rigor with high quality instruction and learning support

**What are some existing resources (not already in wide circulation) that can be used to support students, families, teachers?**

- Spectrum free internet for students for 60 days: <https://www.engadget.com/2020/03/16/spectrum-free-internet-students-coronavirus/>
- Resources for Parents during Coronavirus: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1I7sgng1PpoczZu9BJ8EJ0R8KcMPDTkR502omvJmUNT4/edit>
- What to do with the kiddos: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f3r3ASehz4LMG0Av0\\_yLmGvl3A7hCVGzP4K09TXOzM8/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f3r3ASehz4LMG0Av0_yLmGvl3A7hCVGzP4K09TXOzM8/edit)
- Homeschool Resources: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rBqt7UJ7U\\_8Nz0mnLgbRd3TsSgzoJ1gawefZPCNNmAY/preview?fbclid=IwAR3yxalmwydArpT4-1sKZs7XwKCYJqzer4Y\\_evb3T4WrgrBJmYYEcAvSjjw](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rBqt7UJ7U_8Nz0mnLgbRd3TsSgzoJ1gawefZPCNNmAY/preview?fbclid=IwAR3yxalmwydArpT4-1sKZs7XwKCYJqzer4Y_evb3T4WrgrBJmYYEcAvSjjw)

**What are four (4) things that educators and families should be thinking about to minimize the socioemotional and mental toll of/anxieties caused by this social emergency?**

- Breaks in between school work; have a well-planned day with every day routines established
- Mindfulness (e.g., Liberate: Meditation and Mindfulness App: <https://liberatemeditation.com/>)
- Regular check-ins and the giving of space for students to talk about how they are feeling and how they are adjusting to the change; create a safe environment to express feelings and thoughts (e.g., Pod Mapping for Mutual Aid; Source: the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QfMn1DE6ymhKZMpXN1LQvD6Sy\\_HSnnCK6gTO7ZLFrE/mobilbasic](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QfMn1DE6ymhKZMpXN1LQvD6Sy_HSnnCK6gTO7ZLFrE/mobilbasic))
- A virtual support group for parents (it can get overwhelming)

**What are two (2) things that educators and families should be thinking about to maximize feelings of belonging, connectedness, worth, and learning?**

- Ideas for parents on how to spend the day with their children being at home 24/7 (For example, parents should take advantage of their children being at home to help them to organize their area of work)
- Strategies and structures for building remote communities through online platforms, video chats, conference calls, outdoor exercise, etc.