



# Removing Barriers to Effective Distance Learning by Applying the High-Leverage Practices

## Tips and Tools

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Debra Herburger, WestEd, National Center for Systemic Improvement, Lynn Holdheide, American Institutes for Research, CEEDAR Center, and Donna Sacco, PhD, American Institutes for Research, CEEDAR Center



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# INTRODUCTION

Distance learning offers a unique opportunity to individualize and personalize instruction and establish inclusive learning environments for the range of diverse learners in every district, school, and virtual classroom. Applying high-leverage practices (HLPs) to lesson design and delivery, both in-person and virtually, empowers educators to provide the enabling conditions that ensure diverse learners are provided equitable access to high-quality instruction, across all grade levels and in all content areas. Taking advantage of digital technologies can increase and improve opportunities for building in supports and scaffolds to help all students understand, navigate, and engage in distance learning environments. HLPs, often referred to as the fundamentals of teaching when used intentionally to meet students' needs, provide a solid foundation for students' access to the curriculum and learning new content in any learning context.

This special issues brief from the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR Center) and the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) outlines how HLPs can be employed to strengthen distance learning instruction for a diverse range of students by providing strategies to address common challenges students experience.

This brief is designed to support all teachers who are striving to ensure students of all backgrounds and abilities are provided equitable access to high-quality instruction in distance learning environments by:

- identifying several common barriers that impede effective distance learning;
- strengthening educators' understanding and use of HLPs to address common barriers;
- identifying potential strategies that teachers can apply to improve equitable access to content and learning; and
- providing resources for teachers to further develop their knowledge and skill in implementing HLPs.

## DISTANCE LEARNING

In the context of this brief, the term “distance learning” addresses variations of teaching and learning models that include any form of online learning: blended learning, e-learning, virtual classroom, remote digital instruction, as well as any hybrid models that entail students learning at school part time and from home part time.

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# HIGH-LEVERAGE PRACTICES | What Are They?

HLPs are a set of practices that are fundamental to support K–12 student learning; they can be taught, learned, and implemented by those entering the profession.<sup>1</sup> HLPs are practices that novices and effective teachers implement frequently, are broadly applicable to all subject areas and grade levels, and foster student engagement and learning.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, HLPs are a set of practices that are necessary to support student learning and that should be learned and implemented by all preservice and in-service teachers. HLPs provide precision and clarity to teaching. HLPs are appropriate for all students and can support student learning in all contexts. Teachers who use HLPs and incorporate culturally responsive teaching can facilitate development of diverse learners. Likewise, HLPs and evidence-based practices, or EBPs, can be used in a complementary way to improve special and general education teachers' instruction for students with disabilities.

CEEDAR and the Council for Exceptional Children have identified 22 HLPs. HLPs can be used with **all students** and play a role in establishing and maintaining an inclusive learning environment. Building and maintaining a climate of trust and inclusion remains critical in all learning environments. Regardless of the location or context, all educators should share ownership for the learning and progress of all students, with high-quality instruction at the core. HLPs serve as foundational in the delivery of effective instruction in all learning environments for all students. In fact, the first HLP is “Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.” Other professionals such as instructional support specialists, speech pathologists, paraprofessionals, and teacher candidates can be instrumental in supporting distance learning and mitigating any potential learning loss as described in the box “Leveraging Paraprofessionals and Teacher Candidates to Support Distance Learning” on page 21.

## Accessibility

HLPs are designed to improve teaching and learning for all students, including those with disabilities and others who struggle; before the HLPs can be implemented, ensuring that the technology (hardware and software) as well as content materials are accessible for all learners is a necessity.

The CEEDAR and CEC HLPs are highlighted within this brief. Although there are 22 HLPs, for the purposes of this resource, we have selected the two most applicable to the specific barriers outlined within this guidance. However, other HLPs can and should be used to mitigate barriers. For a complete listing of HLPs and available resources, visit [www.highleveragepractices.org](http://www.highleveragepractices.org).

## RESOURCES TO ENSURE DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

- [Digital Accessibility: How Schools and Teachers Can Support Students with Disabilities in Remote Learning](#)
- [Digital Accessibility Toolkit: What Education Leaders Need to Know](#)

<sup>1</sup> Windschitl, M., Thompson, J., Braaten, M., & Stroupe, D. (2012). Proposing a core set of instructional practices and tools for teachers of science. *Science Education*, 96(5), 878–903. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21027>

<sup>2</sup> McLeskey, J., & Brownell, M. (2015). *High-leverage practices and teacher preparation in special education* (Document No. PR-1). University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center. Retrieved from <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/High-Leverage-Practices-and-Teacher-Preparation-in-Special-Education.pdf>

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## Intended Audience.

The primary audience for this guide is educators who provide distance learning. Others who may directly benefit from this guide include:

- faculty within educator preparation programs
- state and district professional development providers
- school leaders
- families/caregivers

## Roadmap for This Brief.

This brief is organized around six primary barriers teachers often face with distance learning. Each barrier includes two corresponding HLPs that can be used to address each barrier.

In addition, each identified barrier has four sections:

1. **Why:** A brief explanation of the barrier and why it is important to address.
2. **What:** Two HLPs that can be leveraged to mitigate the barriers and improve student learning. See Table 1.
3. **How:** Several explicit examples of how the HLPs can be applied in a distance learning environment.
4. **Tools to Support Implementation:** A few examples to illustrate how to implement HLPs. Several examples will include specific education technology programs or applications; these are not intended to be a definitive list of educational technology or recommendations, but rather serve as examples only.

Appendix A provides a list of knowledge development resources.



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## HIGH LEVERAGE PRACTICES: WHAT ARE THEY?

**Table 1. What: Barrier and HLP Alignment**

Barrier	Connecting HLPs
<b>Barrier 1:</b> Struggling to keep students focused and engaged	HLP 16: Use explicit instruction. HLP 14: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.
<b>Barrier 2:</b> Ensuring students feel connected and that their social and emotional needs are addressed	HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment. HLP 9: Teach social behaviors.
<b>Barrier 3:</b> Helping students' manage their workload and avoid being overwhelmed	HLP 13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals. HLP 15: Provide scaffolded supports.
<b>Barrier 4:</b> Supporting students' learning so they can process and retain new content	HPL 8 and 22: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior. HLP 21: Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.
<b>Barrier 5:</b> Addressing students' wide range of skills and experiences using technology for learning	HLP 4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs. HLP 19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.
<b>Barrier 6:</b> Facilitating family engagement	HLP 2: Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families. HLP 3: Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.

### A NOTE ON TOOL SELECTION AND USE.

- Keep it simple and consistent. Introducing too many tools can be overwhelming.
- The tools included are not intended to be a definitive list of educational technology or recommendations, but rather serve as examples only.
- Explicitly teach, model, and reteach how the tools are used.
- Ensure that the application or educational technology selection supports the desired learning outcome. Use the right technology platform for the right teaching.
- Ensure that accessibility features are included.
- Review the tools and select those most appropriate to your contexts. We have only selected a few tools for each barrier. We tried to select tools that are highly rated and free (or inexpensive).
- Investigate and use tools currently used by the district and school.

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# BARRIER 1 | Struggling to keep students focused and engaged.

## Why This Is Important.

Distance learning environments require a higher level of student motivation, discipline, and focus compared with the traditional in-person learning environment. Students may struggle to stay engaged for several reasons. The content may be too challenging or not challenging enough, they may be distracted by external stimuli, they may feel disconnected from their teacher and classmates, and the content may not be accessible. Students also engage in different ways, and student engagement may not look the same for every student. Teachers can significantly impact student engagement by rethinking and modifying learning experiences for the remote learning context so that all students' needs are met. Higher levels of student engagement are associated with higher levels of student satisfaction, improved academic achievement, and increased graduation rates.<sup>3</sup>

## How to Address the Need: Applicable HLPs.

Educators can establish the enabling conditions for students to remain engaged and focused using the following HLPs:

- **HLP 16: Use explicit instruction.**

Teachers make content, skills, and concepts explicit by showing and telling students what to do or think while solving problems, enacting strategies, completing tasks, and classifying concepts. Teachers use explicit instruction when students are learning new material and complex concepts and skills in all learning environments. They strategically choose examples and non-examples and pair with teacher modeling and guided practice.

- **HLP 14: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.**

Teachers explicitly teach cognitive and metacognitive processing strategies to support memory, attention, and self-regulation of learning within all learning environments (e.g., in-person, distance, and blended). Learning involves not only understanding content but also using cognitive processes to solve problems, regulate attention, organize thoughts and materials, and monitor one's own thinking.

<sup>3</sup> Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, 74, 262-273. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08283.x>; Lee, J.-S. (2014). The relationship between student engagement and academic performance: Is it a myth or reality? *The Journal of Educational Research*, 107, 3, 177-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.807491>

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## How to Implement the HLPs.

### ■ Offer students:

- Step-by-step directions, modeling, and guided and supportive practice using technology features designed to facilitate student engagement (e.g., breakout rooms, chat boxes, discussion boards).
- Video-recorded explanations of challenging concepts that are explicit; compile them into an online repository (e.g., Google Drive) to provide students with easy and repeated access.

### ■ Consider instructional strategies such as:

- Explicitly teach cognitive processes strategies to help students stay focused using online applications that support time management, track productivity, and manage attention (e.g., block distracting sites, turn off notifications).
  - Build in opportunities for students to reflect on understanding. Using Google Docs, ask students to reflect on what they have learned by responding to questions like: “Did I understand what I just read? What information or ideas are relevant?”
  - Schedule check-in meetings with students using Zoom or other video platforms in which students are prompted to “think aloud” about their thinking processes in completing a task and are provided with feedback and guidance. Provide repeated practice opportunities so students can begin to internalize what they are learning.
  - Use online graphic organizers or brainstorming tools to help students consciously improve their thinking processes (e.g., organizing thoughts, creating connections, visualizing processes).
  - Use Google features like Read&Write to prompt students to use active reading strategies (e.g., highlighting key text, scanning for main ideas).
- **Accessibility/Technology tip:** Provide accommodations for students who have expressive speech or language impairment by holding discussions using discussion boards as opposed to online chats.



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## Tools to Support Implementation

### Apps and online resources to help focus:

- [Strict Workflow](#) – temporarily blocks social media and other time-wasting websites
- [LeechBlock](#) (Chrome, Firefox) – uses timers to block or allow website access
- [Mindful Browsing](#) (Chrome) – gently nudges students away from time-wasting sites
- [RescueTime](#) (Android, iOS, Linux, macOS, Web, Windows) – tracks productivity and blocks distracting sites
- [StayFocusd](#) (Chrome) – blocks sites in Chrome
- [Focus Keeper Pro](#) – uses a timer to help keep students on task longer

### Apps and online resources to provide accommodations:

- [SMMRY, or rewordify](#) – modifies Lexile and length
- [Screencasting software](#) – moves recording to text
- [Microsoft's Immersive Reader](#) – changes text to speech
- [Google's Read Aloud](#) – changes text to speech
- [Amara](#) – provides closed-captioning for free

### Apps and online resources to support metacognition:

- [MindMeister](#) – supports brainstorming and notetaking
- [MindMup](#) – helps focus ideas and remove distractions
- [Coggle](#) – offers mind maps, graphic organizers, and concept maps
- [Scribble](#) – assists with taking notes and highlighting online text

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## BARRIER 2 | Ensuring students feel connected and that their social and emotional needs are addressed.

### Why This Is Important.

Change is hard. Transitioning to a distance learning environment can result in increased anxiety and stress for students and their families. Stress and anxiety can adversely affect academic achievement.<sup>4</sup> Educators need to be conscientious of students' social and emotional needs as they help students navigate this transition. The causes and symptoms of increased anxiety will vary, ranging from technical challenges that students encounter when learning a new platform to the social isolation they experience. Students who exhibit behavior problems with in-person classrooms may shut down or become unresponsive in distance learning environments. Others may be overwhelmed and unable to process new information because of sensory overload. Whatever the cause, teachers can implement strategies to establish clear routines and expectations, provide scaffolds to support student self-regulation, and create distance learning environments where students feel safe and a sense of community is established.

### How to Address the Need: Applicable HLPs.

Educators can teach strategies for managing social-emotional stressors and establish a respectful learning environment for students to help them feel more connected to the school community using the following HLPs:

- **HLP 7: Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.**

Teachers should establish age-appropriate and culturally responsive expectations, routines, and procedures within in-person, distance, and blended learning environments that are positively stated and explicitly taught and practiced across the school year.

- **HLP 9: Teach social behaviors.**

Teachers should explicitly teach appropriate interpersonal skills in distance and blended learning environments, including communication and self-management, aligning lessons with classroom and schoolwide expectations for student behavior.

<sup>4</sup> Grills-Taquechel, A. E., Fletcher, J. M., Vaughn, S. R., & Stuebing, K. K. (2012). Anxiety and reading difficulties in early elementary school: Evidence for unidirectional- or bi-directional relations? *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 43(1), 35-47. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10578-011-0246-1>

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## How to Implement the HLPs.

### ■ Offer students:

- A sense of community and belonging by hosting virtual conversation circles, breakfast/coffee chats, office hours, or other small meetups to give space for listening and processing.
- Predictable routines using an online calendar, stop and start times, and due dates. Help students learn by developing schedules at home for synchronous and asynchronous learning.
- A sense of belonging and build relationships by establishing times for students to socialize and connect with peers during less-structured times. For example, virtual lunch buddies, community hours, or virtual “play dates.”
- Meaningful engagement through regular one-on-one check-ins designed to reinforce group instruction of social skills. This also provides an opportunity for a wellness check.
- Routine everyday check-ins using emojis to match their mood or simply asking students to give a thumbs-up, thumb sideways, or thumbs down. You can also use online anonymous polling tools. Include weekly check-ins or periodic time for reflection, such as at the beginning or end of the week.
- Peer-to-peer check-ins, in which each student is assigned the task of checking in with a classmate. Have students report back with a summary of how their peer is doing.



### ■ Consider instructional strategies such as:

- Explicitly teaching, modeling, and reinforcing expectations in the virtual learning environment (e.g., what it means to be respectful, what it means to participate, how to engage, stay safe, and be responsible).
- Weaving in opportunities for students to practice and reflect on social and emotional skills using virtual discussion platforms, breakout rooms, or applications and share with families for in-home practice. For example, use the four-step mindfulness process of [RAIN](#) to help students practice recognizing their emotions so they can “respond, not react, to challenging situations” that emerge with distance learning.<sup>5</sup>
- Assessing students’ social and emotional skills and prioritize units and lessons that support students’ social and emotional health and well-being.
- Periodically reassessing and evaluating the learning environment and social behaviors being taught.

### ■ Accessibility/Technology tip:

- Use data tools available within most technology applications to understand how often students are interacting.

<sup>5</sup> Salzberg, S. (2018). *RAIN: A mindfulness practice for welcoming your emotions*. Retrieved from <https://www.mindful.org/rain-a-mindfulness-practice-for-welcoming-your-emotions/>

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## Tools to Support Implementation

### Apps and online resources to help with social and emotional learning skill development:.

- [Coach.me Habit Tracker](#) – helps to establish better habits
- [Stop, Breathe & Think Kids: Focus, Calm & Sleep](#) – offers guided meditation videos
- [Headspace](#) – offers guided meditations to handle stress or relationships
- [Three Good Things: A Happiness Journal](#) – helps students focus on positive things
- [GoNoodle](#) – offers videos, games, and activities to practice mindfulness
- [Smiling Mind](#) – helps students bring mindfulness into their lives

### Apps and online resources to help students establish routines:.

- [Myhomework](#) – features student planner to help students track homework assignments
- [iHomework2 planner](#) – provides flexible homework tracking
- [Choiceworks Calendar](#) – helps alleviate transition anxiety

### Apps and online resources to help students stay connected:.

- [Google Meet](#) – enables students to meet online
- [Flipgrid](#) – creates video discussions to encourage all student voices
- [Tricider](#) – collects students' ideas and helps students form decisions
- [Wevideo](#) – offers an online video editor
- [Canvas discussions](#) – facilitates discussions during asynchronous and synchronous learning
- [Google Suite](#), [Skype](#), or [Hangouts](#) – facilitates small-group discussions

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## BARRIER 3 | Helping students manage their workload and avoid being overwhelmed.

### Why This Is Important.

A lack of structure and immediate, in-person support within distance learning environments can contribute to students feeling overwhelmed and unable to manage their workload. Some students pick up organizational skills independently, and others need to be taught.<sup>6</sup> This is true in any learning environment. However, students with gaps in executive functioning and self-regulation may struggle to keep up and learn without teachers and classmates in front of them to discuss and process the material. Consistent procedures for how students ask questions, contribute to virtual discussions, turn in work, and catch up on missed work are critical for all students. For students who may be challenged with attention or processing disorders, consistent routines are imperative. Likewise, teachers can provide effective scaffolding support by adjusting the way the content is presented and can help students apply learning strategies to improve their performance.

### How to Address the Need: Applicable HLPs.

Educators can help students manage the requirements of distance learning by applying the following HLPs:

- **HLP 13: Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.**

Teachers assess individual student needs and adapt curriculum materials and tasks so that students can meet instructional goals. Teachers select materials and tasks based on student needs; use relevant technology; and make modifications by highlighting relevant information, changing task directions, and decreasing amounts of material.

- **HLP 15: Provide scaffolded supports.**

Scaffolded supports provide temporary assistance to students so they can complete tasks that they cannot yet do independently and with a high rate of success. Teachers select powerful visual, verbal, technological, and written supports; evaluate their effectiveness; and gradually remove them once they are no longer needed.

### How to Implement the HLPs.

- **Offer students:**

- Rubrics or examples that provide explanations of the criteria regarding what you would like to see (and not see) for the final assignment so the students can compare their work with the expectations.

<sup>6</sup> The IRIS Center. (2013). *Study skills strategies (part 1): Foundations for effectively teaching study skills*. Retrieved from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/ss1/>

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- Multiple ways for student reflection and demonstration of their own learning in different modalities, such as video creation, podcast, mind maps, oral storytelling, interactive poster, visual storyboard, and so on.
- Links to videos that cover prerequisite knowledge and have students submit work samples (e.g., graphic organizers, online quizzes) to ensure understanding and engagement.
- Opportunities to model and break down complex tasks through [think-alouds](#) or [fishbowl](#) activities to help students visualize the final product.
- Multiple means of engagement to facilitate discussions, elicit students' higher order thinking skills, and establish a classroom community—for example, using various discussion platforms, breakout rooms, online study groups, and virtual simulations.



■ **Consider instructional strategies such as:**

- Explicitly teaching the [Pomodoro Technique](#) by having students schedule a 5-minute break for every 25 minutes of work.
- Using discussion forums where peers can provide feedback and assistance to help students organize their thoughts before starting a challenging project.
- Using online preassessments to identify student needs and adapt course sessions to offer a series of options for learning lessons tailored to student needs.
- Providing scaffolded supports by breaking down assignments into manageable chunks and teaching students to leverage cognitive processes by creating steps and online checklists so students can complete work at their own pace (accommodation) and progress can be monitored.

■ **Accessibility/Technology tip:**

- Adapt curriculum learning materials by using technology platforms that generate text from video recordings, allowing students to read the content, or by modifying reading levels in text to align with learner abilities (e.g., Lexile and length).

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## Tools to Support Implementation

### Apps and online resources to establish expectations and assess student knowledge:.

- [Rubric Maker](#) – creates assessments for student work
- [Roobrix](#) – converts a rubric score to a grade
- [Spiral](#) – supports formative and summative assessment while students to collaborate
- [Interact](#) – creates online assessments
- [Masteryconnect](#) – assessment platform that shows student learning in a visual way
- [IXL](#) – provides teachers with a way to develop assessments that adapt according to what they know

### Apps and online resources to facilitate multiple means of engagements:.

- [Flipgrid](#) – creates video discussions to encourage all student voices
- [Tricider](#) – collects students' ideas and helps students form decisions
- [Canvas discussions](#) – facilitates discussions during asynchronous and synchronous learning
- [Google Suite](#), [Skype](#), or [Hangouts](#) – facilitates small-group discussions

### Apps and online resources to help students establish routines and to improve organization:.

- [Google Keep](#) – enables students to take notes and set up reminders
- [Microsoft To Do](#) – manages to-do lists
- [Checklist](#) – helps with organization and list making
- [Homework2 planner](#) – provides flexible homework tracking
- [Choiceworks Calendar](#) – helps alleviate transition anxiety

### Apps and online resources for simulations:.

- [Phets Interactive Simulations](#) – engages students with science and math
- [Explore Learning Gizmos](#) – engages students with science and math
- [Virtual Labs-Electricity](#) – provides interactive, engaging online learning

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## BARRIER 4 | Supporting students' learning so they can process and retain new content.

### Why This Is Important.

Keeping track of students' participation and performance in distance learning environments extends well beyond following which students log into online learning platforms. Monitoring students' understanding and progress in learning new content is critical to keep students from falling behind and to minimize the likelihood of student disengagement. Learning involves not only understanding new concepts and content but also using cognitive processes to solve problems, organize thoughts and materials, and monitor one's own thinking. Teachers are accustomed to using specific techniques to help students learn, generalize, and maintain newly acquired knowledge and skills. These strategies can be used and adapted for distance learning environments. Instruction in distance learning that is organized, logical, concise, clear, and builds in spaced learning—allowing time for new learning and time for students to digest and process new content—is key to students' success.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, building in regular and timely check-ins using formative assessments will help students reflect on their strengths and learning needs.

### How to Address the Need: Applicable HLPs

Educators can help students remember content and apply new learning by applying the following HLPs:

- **HPL 8 and 22: Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.**

Effective feedback must be strategically delivered and goal directed; feedback is most effective when the learner has a goal and the feedback informs the learner regarding areas needing improvement and ways to improve performance. Feedback may be verbal, nonverbal, or written; can be provided virtually; and should be timely, meaningful, age appropriate, and at rates commensurate with task and phase of learning (i.e., acquisition, fluency, maintenance).

- **HLP 21: Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.**

Effective teachers use specific techniques to teach students to generalize and maintain newly acquired knowledge and skills. Using numerous examples in designing and delivering instruction requires students to apply what they have learned in other settings. Students learn to use new knowledge and skills in places and situations other than the original learning environment and maintain their use in the absence of ongoing instruction.

<sup>7</sup> Pashler, H., Bain, P., Bottge, B., Graesser, A., Koedinger, K., McDaniel, M., & Metcalfe, J. (2007). *Organizing instruction and study to improve student learning* (NCER 2007-2004). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Research. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/20072004.pdf>

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## How to Implement the HLPs.

### ■ Offer students:

- Feedback using technology in engaging and accessible formats; for example, instead of writing notes on a piece of student writing, make an audio recording of your feedback that the student listens to while making corrections.
- Varied learning experiences so that students recognize cues and apply already learned skills across different learning contexts, settings, and people (e.g., turn taking, initiating interactions, making requests for support), and inform other educators and peers to prompt learning strategy use.

### ■ Consider instructional strategies such as:

- Using virtual simulation programs to ensure that students can transfer their learning across different settings, real or simulated.
- Promoting the use of self-monitoring to help generalize skills across learning environments. Ensure students have a clear understanding of the behavior they are monitoring, set prompts at random intervals, and have students record and monitor desired behavior using technology.
- Using a “skills” diary or chart (can be a visual chart) of skills and knowledge the student has already mastered; create digital “badges” or stickers that students can earn.
- Using computer-based instruction to improve students’ skills and automaticity increasing the likelihood of maintenance and generalization (after skills have been already taught).
- Using interactive whiteboards to provide timely and consistent feedback to students. This provides immediate feedback and prevents students from moving forward with errors.
- Support and pair self-determination with student engagement by asking students to create audio recordings reflecting on what they have learned, what they still find challenging, and ways in which they still need support from the teacher.

### ■ Accessibility/Technology tip:

- Keep in mind that accessibility is not a feature to be added after the design of your content. It is a set of principles to be considered throughout the design process. [Guidelines](#) can be considered when designing learning experiences.



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## Tools to Support Implementation

### Apps and online resources to provide positive feedback and coaching:.

- [Loop](#) – develops digital exit tickets
- [ClassDojo](#) – helps teachers/parents support student learning with feedback and celebration
- [Classkick](#) – provides virtual, specific feedback and encourages collaboration
- [Spiral](#) – provides instant feedback and assessment
- [Kaizena](#) – enables audio and text feedback in Google Docs
- [Peergrade](#) – online platform that facilitates peer feedback sessions with students

### Apps and online resources for students to monitor and record behavior:.

- [MotivAider](#) – helps monitor and manage behavior
- [Beeminder](#) – helps monitor progress toward a goal

### Apps and online resources to monitor student engagement:.

- [Equity Maps](#) – shows who is doing the talking
- [Echo360 Analytics](#) – shows views by students
- [Google Keep](#) – enables students to take notes and set up reminders
- [Learning Management Systems](#) – gathers data about learners' performance and interactions

### Apps and online resources to provide computer-assisted instruction:.

- [Starfall](#) – reinforces basic reading and math skills
- [Autoskills](#) – monitors students speed and accuracy in reading
- [Accelerated Reader](#) – tracks students' independent practice and progress with reading
- [Datagifmaker](#) – creates and shares data visualizations
- [Tiny Cards](#) – enables creation of electronic flashcards

### Apps and online resources for simulations:

- [Phets Interactive Simulations](#) – engages students with science and math
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## **BARRIER 5** | Addressing students' wide range of skills and experiences using technology for learning.

### **Why This Is Important.**

The wide variance in students' ability to use technology becomes more relevant in a distance learning environment as students learn to navigate different learning platforms. Teachers themselves may struggle with the new technology requirements and using technological tools to reach all students. Although technology offers ways to improve learning, it can also be overwhelming. Having a solid understanding of students' prior experiences, strengths, and needs related to technology skills is the first step. Next, selecting tools that include accessibility features so that all students can complete the learning activities is critical. Finally, keep technology simple, familiar, and as flexible as possible. Educators may be tempted to use all the resources at their disposal, but this will overwhelm the students.

### **How to Address the Need: Applicable HLPs.**

Educators can address the wide range of technology skills that students have by applying the following HLPs:

- **HLP 4: Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student's strengths and needs.**

Teachers should collect, aggregate, and interpret data from multiple sources (e.g., informal and formal observations, work samples, distance learning engagement, curriculum-based measures, functional behavior assessment [FBA], school files, analysis of curriculum, information from families, other data sources) to develop a deep understanding of a student's strengths and learning needs.

- **HLP 19: Use assistive and instructional technologies.**

Teachers select and implement assistive and instructional technologies to support the needs of students with disabilities. They select and use augmentative and alternative communication devices and assistive and instructional technology products to promote student learning and independence.

**Assistive technology (AT)** refers to devices, software programs, or apps that are used by people with disabilities to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to do.

**Education technology (Ed Tech)** refers to devices, software programs, or apps that are used by the teacher (such as Google Classroom or GoNoodle) that can make learning more engaging, challenging, and accessible.

AT and Ed Tech often intersect when the same tech tool is being used to meet the needs of students. For example, a screen reader that reads text aloud is AT for a student who is blind or visually impaired, while that same screen reader is highly beneficial for a student who struggles with reading.

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## How to Implement the HLPs.

### ■ Offer students:

- Multiple opportunities to model and practice using technology platforms and programs—introducing only one to two at a time.
- Clear expectations for actions that will help students reach the learning outcomes using their assistive technology device.
- A curated collection of short, grade-level-appropriate video tutorials modeling how students can use the assistive and instructional technology to support their learning.

### ■ Consider instructional strategies such as:

- Assessing digital literacy skills to identify students' needs, establish a baseline, and create a plan to ensure all students are comfortable using the technology platforms as part of distance learning.
- Explicitly teaching students how to problem-solve and ask for help with technology. Create an online checklist to guide the process and an online forum specifically for help with technology questions. Depending on the age, students may be asked to moderate the forum.
- Assessing and reviewing what students who use assistive technology will need for each component of online instruction and adjusting accordingly. Ensure that the use of technology helps students access and demonstrate their understanding of the content.
- Discussing the role of family members in the student's use of assistive technology so that integrating the use of assistive technology at home is realistic and feasible.
- Monitoring progress in the use of assistive technology.
- Identifying natural ways to incorporate assistive technology throughout the day, providing the student with multiple opportunities to practice so that they can master and generalize its use.

### ■ Accessibility/Technology tip:

- Realize that not everyone is versatile with technology skills. Provide students and families with appropriate assistance, like step-by-step instructions or video tutorials. Work with district administrators to set up a Tech Help event for families and students who need one-on-one help with technology.



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## Tools to Support Implementation

### Apps and online resources to assess students' digital literacy:

- [Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments](#) – identifies and helps to improve needed skills
- [Florida Gulf Coast University Literacy Assessment](#) – survey designed for assessing digital literacy
- [ProProfs.com Exam](#) – online quiz that helps students gain an understanding of basic digital literacy skills
- [Florida Gulf Coast University Literacy Assessment](#) – survey designed for assessing digital literacy

### Apps and online resources to ensure technology accessibility:

- [ChromeVox](#) – reads content out loud
- [GSuite for Education](#) – features dictation capabilities and allows students to type by using their voice
- [SoundingBoard](#) – augmentative communications device that helps students who are unable to speak communicate
- [Tales2Go](#) – features an audiobook service that helps students who struggle to read while boosting their listening skills
- [Write the World](#) – helps young writers, write, revise, think, and grow

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## BARRIER 6 | Facilitating family engagement.

### Why This Is Important.

Supporting family engagement is an essential role of educators in any learning environment. Educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of engaging families in learning.<sup>8</sup> Family engagement has been linked to improved student engagement and increased student retention. Teachers can help families navigate the shift from in-person to virtual environments. They can be the frontline of encouragement and emotional and technical support as they partner to facilitate learning at home. As we all navigate uncharted territories, we must recognize that all families care about their child's education—but what engagement looks like will vary depending on culture, beliefs, their own educational experiences, availability, and type of employment. Families are looking for guidance. Be patient and creative as you discover new ways to communicate with families to ensure they feel connected, supported, and heard.

### How to Address the Need: Applicable HLPs.

Educators can collaborate with family members to support student learning during distance learning and organize and facilitate effective virtual meetings using the following HLPs:

- **HLP 2: Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families.**

Teachers lead and participate in a range of meetings (e.g., meetings with families, individualized education program [IEP] teams, individualized family services plan teams, instructional planning) and can use virtual meeting platforms to facilitate sharing of multiple perspectives and to solicit input from other professionals, families, and students.

- **HLP 3: Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.**

Collaboration with general education teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff is necessary to support students' learning toward measurable outcomes and to facilitate students' social and emotional well-being across all school environments and instructional settings (e.g., distance or blended learning).

<sup>8</sup> Ferlazzo, J. (2011, May). Involvement or engagement? *Educational Leadership*, 68(8), 10–14; Blackboard. (2016). *How K-12 schools are meeting the expectations of parents for digital communications*. Retrieved from <https://tomorrow.org/speakup/2016-digital-learning-reports-from-blackboard-and-speak-up.html>; Sheldon, S. B., & Jung, S. B. (2015). *Parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, School of Education.

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## How to Implement the HLPs.

### ■ Offer families:

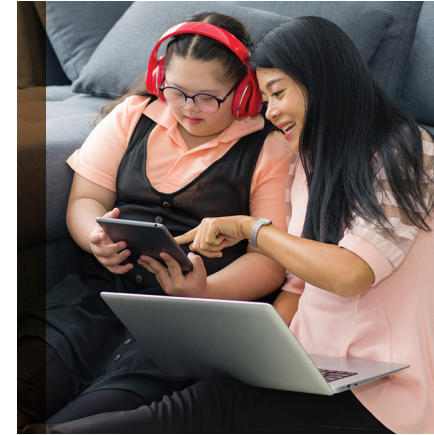
- Regular check-ins to ask how their child is handling the transition to virtual learning. Try to understand the barriers parents and caregivers themselves are finding as well as the nature of their students' needs.
- Virtual IEP meeting [tip sheets](#) to help guide them through a process that, while familiar, is within a new environment.
- Information about student successes and strengths as well as areas in which you are working toward improvement. Share data on student progress using graphs and visuals where possible. Include the student when discussing progress monitoring and goal setting.

### ■ Consider strategies such as:

- Helping families establish routines and sending regular messages with tips, activities, and videos, including clear and simple expectations for families and students for every lesson and activity. Provide families with a daily checklist and examples of completed assignments.
- Establishing clear expectations for two-way communication. Define when and how you can be contacted (e.g., emails will be responded to during work hours).
- Keeping a communication log to ensure you are touching base with every family regularly. Ask parents and caregivers how and when to best contact them.
- Being mindful and empathetic as you consider the challenges the family may be facing with balancing everything in their households as they adapt to distance learning. Be flexible with assignments. Demonstrate active listening and solicit feedback from parents and caregivers.
- Creating a community. Help families and students connect with each other by setting up a monthly class Zoom social hour.
- Providing links to translation services for families to ensure they can access all communications. Also, recognize the strengths of the family and honor cultural diversity and assets within the family. Be open to different perspectives.

### ■ Accessibility/Technology tip:

- Realize that not everyone is versatile with technology skills. What might be easy for you may be entirely new to a family member with whom you are collaborating. Try to provide them with the appropriate assistance. Work with district administrators to set up a Tech Help event for families who need one-on-one help with technology. Also, create step-by-step instructions or video tutorials for parents on how to use learning management systems or other technology platforms.



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## Tools to Support Implementation

### Apps and online resources to help with communication:.

- [Bloomz](#) – provides a full-featured parent-teacher communication platform
- [Remind](#) – texts student and parents to keep them up to speed
- [Talking Points](#) – features multilingual texting tool to enhance school-to-home communication
- [Classtag tool](#) – helps teachers and parents stay in sync
- [Guardian Google Class](#) – provides summary emails to families

### Apps and online resources to help students establish routines:

- [Daily Checklist](#) – increases students' independence and holds them accountable
- [Myhomework](#) – offers a student planner to help students track homework assignments
- [IHomework2 planner](#) – facilitates flexible homework tracking
- [Choiceworks Calendar](#) – helps alleviate transition anxiety
- [SelfControl](#) – blocks websites from being available at certain times

### Apps and online resources to help families stay connected:.

- [Google Meet](#) – enables families to meet online
- [Zoom](#) – engages families in class discussions

## LEVERAGING PARAPROFESSIONALS AND TEACHER CANDIDATES TO SUPPORT DISTANCE LEARNING.

### HLP 1: Collaborate with professionals to increase student success.

Paraprofessionals and teacher candidates can be valuable assets and offer multiple benefits to students, teachers, and parents. They can:

- Observe and note students who seem to be having a harder time engaging and being included, and share this information with the teacher.
- Post class materials and resources to online sites.
- Take notes and create support materials (such as scaffolded notes and graphic organizers) (in Google Docs or other platforms that the teacher is using).
- Facilitate a smaller group in a virtual breakout room.
- Support Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions with intervention teachers.
- Host an online “resource room” where students can drop in during specified times for direct help.
- Review modules to check accessibility.
- Host check-in sessions to address technology issues.
- Make audio recordings of stories, books, and textbook passages that students need audio access to but are not available otherwise.
- Support paraprofessionals in their own learning of technology. Ensure they are invited to professional learning opportunities.

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## High-Leverage Practice Resources.

- [CEEDAR's Family Guide to At Home Learning](#) – offers practical strategies that work for helping children of all ages who may be struggling with an at-home learning task
- [About the High-Leverage Practices](#) – overview of how the high-leverage practices (HLPs) were identified, the supporting research, and the HLPs broken into four aspects of practice—collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral practices, and instruction
- [High-Leverage Practice Videos](#) – video series of teachers implementing HLPs
- [Introducing High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#) – a professional development guide to assist school leaders in planning and implementing professional development about HLPs to K–12 educators
- IRIS Center and CEEDAR Center's [interactive alignment tool](#) – highlights HLP alignment with existing IRIS Center resources

## Educational Technology Resources.

- [How to Use Ed Tech Tools to Provide Feedback to Students](#) – offers guidance to teachers
- [Edutopia's Assistive Technology Roundup](#) – provides an overview of assistive technology, links to webinars, tools, and assistive technology apps
- [Common Sense Ed Tech Rating and Reviews](#) – provides in-depth reviews of apps to help teachers select the right apps
- [Technology Skills Checklist](#) – describes students' anticipated technology needs
- Example [video tutorial](#) – demonstrates the use of technology to students
- [Common Sense Accessibility Settings](#) – provides guidance for families and teachers
- [We Are Civil Communicators](#) – features a 12th-grade lesson that helps students identify best ways to engage in online discussions meaningfully and respectfully

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- [Digital Drama Unplugged](#) – features a sixth-grade lesson for teachers interested in addressing some of the social challenges of using online collaboration tools
- [Connecting with Digital Audiences](#) – features an 11th-grade lesson to help high school students rethink how they use their devices if they transition to a virtual learning environment
- Edutopia’s [Using Technology to Empower Students With Special Needs](#) – describes how G Suite for Education can be used to facilitate learning for students with disabilities
- Center on Technology and Disability’s [Digital Accessibility Toolkit: What Educational Leaders Need to Know](#) – offers resources, tips, and information for state and district leaders that provides guidance on how to ensure accessibility is part of the educational equation

## Distance Learning Resources.

- [Ten Components for Organizing Online Structure](#) – provides tips for providing structure to online teaching
- [Setting up a Virtual Classroom Tips and Resources](#) – provides information for classroom teachers
- Understood.org’s [Distance Learning: Start Strong With These Back-to-School Resources for Families and Educators](#) – offers resources for families and educators to prepare for back to school
- PROGRESS Center’s [Virtual IEP Toolkit](#) – provides information about holding virtual individualized education program meetings
- National Center for Systemic Improvement’s [Distance Learning Hub](#) – offers resources, tools, and guidance on distance learning
- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center’s [Remote Learning and Distance Learning](#) – a repository of resources, tools, and guidance on distance learning in an early childhood context
- [IRIS Center’s Family Engagement: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities](#) – a professional learning module that addresses the importance of engaging families

## Instructional Support Resources.

- [Common Sense Best Apps and Sites for Improving Executive Function](#) – designed to support executive functioning
- Understood.org’s [What Is Executive Function?](#) – helps teachers develop students’ executive functioning skills

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- Understood.org's [Distance Learning: 6 Universal Design for Learning Best Practices for Online Learning](#) – offers a list of best practices for distance learning with UDL
- Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute's [Supporting Students with Disabilities in K–12 Online and Blended Learning](#) – provides strategies to support for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services for students with disabilities enrolled in online and blended learning environments
- [Helping All Students: Scaffolding](#) – features strategies to support student learning
- [Universal Design for Learning](#) – provides examples of multiple means of action and expression
- National Center on Intensive Intervention [tip sheet](#) – provides information about collecting progress monitoring data virtually
- Understood.org's [Social and Emotional Learning Tools](#) – tips to help teachers focus on the development of social and emotional learning in a distance learning context
- Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports' [Creating a PBIS Behavior Teacher Metrix for Remote Instruction](#) – shares tips for maintaining continuity of learning through defining classroom expectations for remote (i.e., distance) instruction and online learning environments
- [Putting Metacognition into Practice](#) – specific activities for promoting metacognition
- [GENERALIZATION: Five Effective Strategies](#) – journal article that describes five strategies to support generalization
- National Center on Intensive Intervention's [Intensive Intervention Course Content: Features of Explicit Instruction](#) – offers a set of course content focused on developing educators' skills in using explicit instruction
- CEDAR Center's [Supporting Content Learning Through Technology for K–12 Students With Disabilities](#) – paper that features an innovation configuration (IC) matrix that can guide teacher preparation professionals in supporting content learning through technology for K–12 students with disabilities

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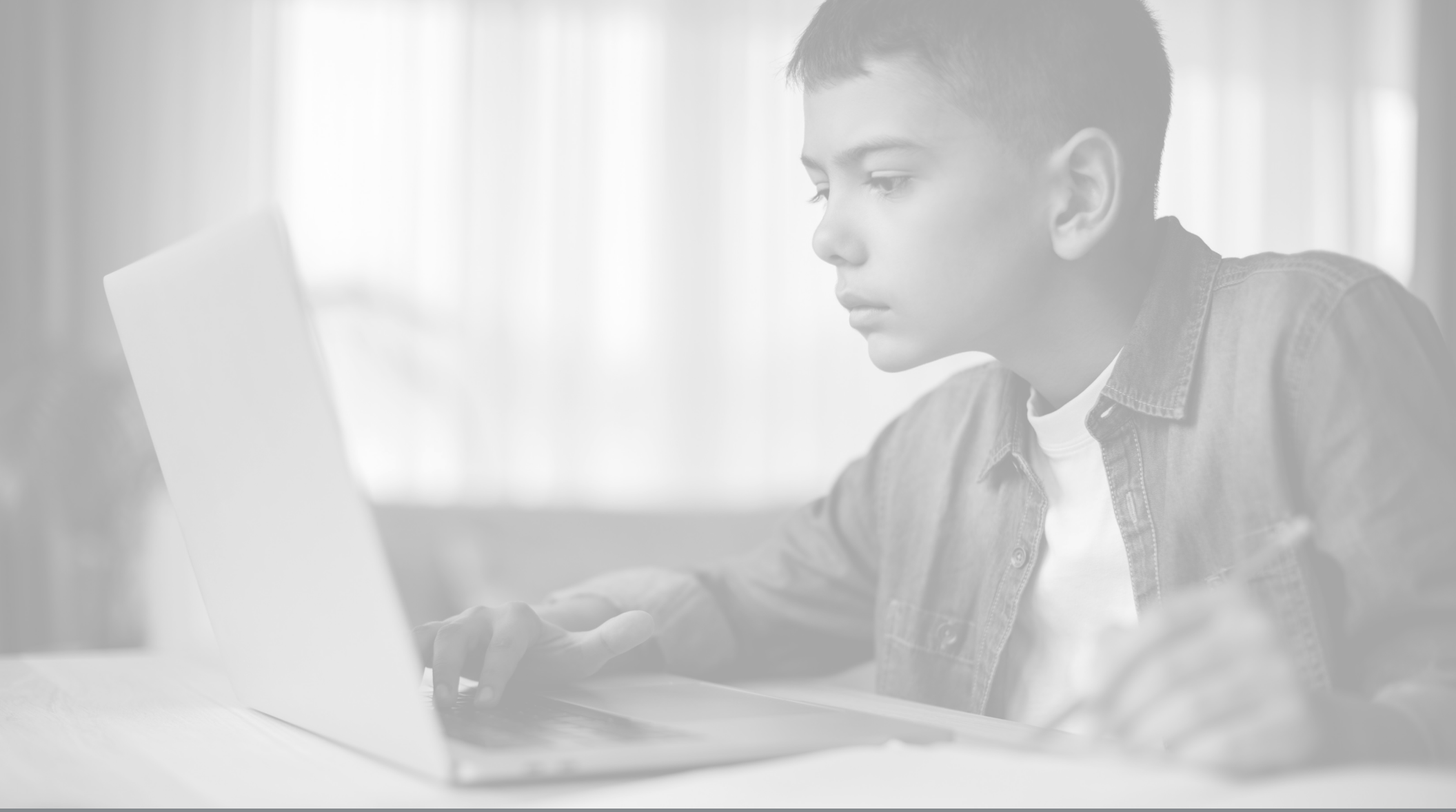
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