

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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TIP SHEET

ENGAGING WITH SCHOOLS DURING REMOTE INSTRUCTION

This tip sheet presents ideas for predicting and overcoming roadblocks you may encounter when communicating with your school stakeholders as many of them have moved to remote instruction.

First, remember your program has a lot to offer:

1. Past successes – your stakeholders have already seen the value your programs can offer. Be confident that they value your relationship with them and keep that in mind when communicating with them. Even though it may seem like you are asking a lot, you are also providing a lot.
2. Crucial services for the current situation – with remote instruction becoming the norm, schools will be challenged to think creatively about meeting the social and emotional needs of their students. Consider how your programs can meet this need – for example, if you have not done so, now would be a good time to align the objectives of your YPE model curriculum to the Illinois State Social and Emotional Learning standards, and utilize that when communicating with your school stakeholders.

If you are working with a new school:

Emphasize the benefits. Without a history to lean on, you will need to show why school stakeholders should make your programs a priority. Emphasize relevant data, learning standards and program objectives.

Develop your “ask.”

1. With so much on their plate, it is best to come to your stakeholders with options to present. Rather than ask, “how can we get our messages to your students,” you should structure your communication around presenting options and asking which of those would work for them.
2. Do your research and determine your school’s plan for remote instruction. Research the platform they will utilize and its features. This will give you a sense of the range of possibilities for communicating with students, and tailor your “menu” of options based on this.
 - a. The Prevention Technology and Transfer Center (PTTC) Network has developed a resource page that includes tips for working with different platforms, considerations for virtual facilitation, etc. Access it here: <https://pttcnetwork.org/centers/global-pttc/bringing-prevention-virtual>



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- b. “Asks” could include: sharing materials with students via email, virtual classroom channels (even establishing a dedicated prevention channel), school social media platforms, and/or other existing school communication channels such as newsletters
 - c. Stay informed so you know when things change (from virtual to in-person). Consider attending virtual school board meetings in your service area and checking your school/school district calendar regularly for updates.
 - d. When you do reach them, ask school staff how you can provide them with prevention-related support.
3. Keep your standards and best practice in mind when you develop the options you present to your stakeholders. If you don’t ask for it, you likely won’t get it, so aim for sticking as close to fidelity as your situation allows.
 4. Be prepared for the questions you may get. Try to put yourself in your stakeholders’ shoes. “How much time will this need,” “How can we maintain confidentiality,” and “How can we keep students engaged” are some examples. Develop your responses beforehand. When in doubt, let them know you are not sure but will work on those concerns.

Communication may look different now.

1. Consider the landscape of your community and school situation. You may want to begin opening a line of communication by providing expectations for how you plan to communicate with your stakeholders. Before making your “ask,” let them know you will be reaching out soon rather than stating them upfront. That will provide your stakeholders an opportunity to inform you of the best method and timing to contact them. Keep fostering the relationship without being pushy.
2. Establish what you will consider your due diligence. Despite your best efforts, your school stakeholders may not be engaging with you at the moment. Determine how many calls or emails you will make before you decide to hold off on further communication. Remember that you want to maintain the relationship for later down the road, so consider what might be too much communication.
3. Vary your strategy. Phone calls may not be as viable as they once were, as stakeholders work remotely. At the same time, don’t rely too much on a specific channel: everyone is getting more electronic correspondence than ever, so if there is a number you can reach stakeholders at, incorporate that into your strategy.
4. Summarize and/or highlight key points. For example, if you are looking for a school to agree to changes in a Linkage Agreement to reflect remote instruction, provide a summary or list of changes in addition to the agreement itself.

Keep in mind best practices for any communication plan

While a lot has changed, the basics of a communication plan have not. Keep in mind these questions:

- » What do you want people to know or do? – **Goal**
- » Who are you communicating with? – **Audience**
- » What information do you want to communicate? – **Message**
- » What are you going to do? – **Strategies**
- » When are you going to do it? – **Timeline**
- » Who is going to do it? – **Staffing and/or partnerships**
- » How much will it cost? – **Budget**
- » Did it work? – **Evaluation**

References

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