Scan of Wisconsin School District Learning Plans in Spring 2020

Region 10 Comprehensive Center

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced school districts and state education agencies (SEAs) across the country to pivot abruptly to universal K12 remote learning. In Wisconsin, Emergency Order #1 required all public and private schools in the state to close as of March 18th, 2020 and remain closed through the end of the school year. The effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 while also maintaining continuity of learning for students meant districts and schools had to quickly, in the span of 8-10 days, develop and implement remote learning plans.

Causing dramatic shifts in how K12 schools are organized and administered, COVID-19 is the most recent of public health crises to lay bare and amplify structural inequities in our society and education systems, presenting critical challenges to the families, communities, and organizations we serve. These challenges compel SEAs and districts to recommit their focus onto equitable access and outcomes for all learners.

Purpose of Scan

The purpose of this initial scan was to take a systematic snapshot of the development of remote learning plans in school districts in Wisconsin during the Spring of 2020. The primary intent is to identify promising practices that emerged within the context of COVID-19 to share these practices with school districts (LEAs) and to inform how the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) might target assistance and resources moving forward. An additional purpose of this scan was to recognize promising practices that ensure equitable and high-quality learning opportunities for students in future remote learning circumstances. The scan is not intended to be used to identify and call out specific districts, but instead as a formative learning tool to improve plans and SEA support structures. A follow-up to this report on learning plans in the 2020-21 school year can be found under the Resources tab on the Wisconsin-Minnesota Comprehensive Center website (wmcc10.org).

National Efforts to Review Remote Learning Plans

Our initial scan of remote learning plans in Wisconsin occurred in the context of many similar efforts around the country, for example:

- American Institutes for Research
- REACH at Tulane University
- Regional Educational Laboratory Central

A list of selected examples of these efforts, with associated resources, can be found here.

Scan Methods

The overall process and timeline of the scan was developed in collaboration between the entire WMCC team and representatives from the DPI, and is outlined in Table 1. The timing and organization of these phases were made in attempts to respond quickly as the pandemic context was rolling out in Spring and Summer of 2020. Similarly, we developed the following process to sample districts through discussions with DPI:

- Phase I district sample (n=35):
  - Took the first 20 districts in the most recent list of districts ranked by enrollment size available from DPI with the rationale it would then cover more of the students in the state.
  - Using the same file, took a random sample of districts with between 100 and 600 students enrolled (based on federal eligibility for rural schools programs being 600 or under and omitting any Milwaukee charters).
  - Added in the four tribal schools
  - Checked if all 12 CESAs were represented and CESA 4 and 12 were not represented so we included the highest enrollment district for those two CESAs
- Phase II district sample (n=24): Included the first district from a list of those suggested by DPI for each CESA (both rural and suburban list), unless it was already included in Phase I, in which case we used the alternate.

We drew eight codes or categories we used to review each plan from the [Virtual Learning Plan template from DPI](). We then added a category related to the usability of the plan or website itself. See Table 2for a complete list of each category, a description of the rating criteria, and the number of districts in each rating category.

In the analysis of this initial scan we chose to focus on the plans that were easy to access and included details in the various elements of the plans (i.e. those rated "Excellent" or green), to ideally surface patterns in promising practices with those examples. Given the urgency to get information to DPI quickly as the early pandemic unfolded, we felt this approach would provide DPI and LEAs with some concrete and positive examples of practices to support and potentially promote. Table 1 below details the process of developing and implementing the scan, along with the associated timeline.

Table 1: Remote learning plan scan process and timeline

Task	Timeline
Discuss respective purposes and approaches for scans across Wisconsin and Minnesota.	Mid April
Develop criteria for scan and database for collecting information and links, in consultation with DPI	Late April
Establish sample for first group of districts in Phase I	Late April
Initial scan to populate district website and basic district info in Phase I sample into scan database	Late April
Collect links for Phase I district learning plans and include in spreadsheet	Late April
Test coding of three districts across team, followed by discussion of ratings to ensure reliability and validity	Late April
Code information in spreadsheet for each district plan in Phase I along 8 categories (see "Categories" column in Table 2 below)	Early May
Prepare draft outline of WMCC report and provide to DPI along with spreadsheet; share at REP meeting	Early May
Meet with CAREI to discuss common challenges, analytic approaches, and reporting strategy	Early May

Use Phase I data to establish overall themes for each category, as well as related to equity and district needs	Mid May
Establish sample of second group of districts in Phase II, from DPI suggested list across 12 CESAs	Mid May
Review and revise criteria for scan and spreadsheet for collecting information and links if needed	Mid May
Initial scan to populate district website and basic district info in Phase II sample into scan database	Mid May
Collect information and links from on plans in Phase II sample into spreadsheet	Mid May
Code information in spreadsheet for each district plan in Phase II along 8 categories (see Table 2 below)	Late May
Use Phase II data to confirm, revise and check overall themes for each category, as well as related to equity and district needs	Late May
Team meeting to discuss analytic themes and creating aggregate tables of ratings	Late May
Finalize summary report of themes from Phase I and II scan and provide to DPI along with spreadsheet; share at REP meeting	Early June

Some important limitations to this scan included the desire to complete the scan quickly and to get relevant and formative feedback to DPI. In choosing a sample of districts in Wisconsin (instead of looking at all districts), there are inevitable limitations and we may miss important characteristics of plans, district needs, and concerns related to equity. We were also limited because district websites were our only source of information about plans, and we did not attempt to engage district administrators in gathering more data or perspective on their remote learning plans.

Emerging Themes

Nature of Remote Learning Plans

We considered a "remote learning plan" to be whatever a district has put on their website to guide students, families and/or educators on how to "do school" during the Safer at Home order starting in March 2020. The following section details findings along the eight categories described in Table 2.

Table 2: Ratings of Learning Plan Categories Across District Sample (n=59)

Key Rating:

Excellent, Mentioned & Plan Described
Fair/Mentioned Only in Plan
Difficult/Not mentioned
Information not available/not observed

Category	# Districts	Criteria for Rating
Level of Usability	12	On home page as a link or its own tab.
	18	Tricky to find, scattered info, took a couple clicks.
	23	Vague, scattered info, took handful of clicks, resorted to searching key terms, no real plan found.
	6	No actual plan found.
Internet & Device Access	32	Info clear, sometimes slightly scattered, sometimes notes either internet access or devices provided as opposed to both.
	11	Info mentioned, limited, sometimes no info on internet access or devices provided.
	7	Not found.
	4	Out of time. Vague, "call the office and make arrangements."
Online Learning Experience	24	Platforms, apps, resources, FAQs, plans, assignments, sometimes specifics not listed.
	24	Platforms/apps mentioned, scattered resources, survey for parents/students, no specific plans/tools found.
	4	Not found.
	2	Out of time.
Staff Access	21	Info broken up/differ by grade and/or school pages, staff available with listed contact info/preferences.
	22	Vague/no specific plan or webpage not working.
	6	Not found.
	5	Out of time.
Communication Expectations for Learning	25	Learning guide, times/expectations specified per grade, sometimes vague suggestions.
	19	Vague, optional info, no specific plan, cannot access info publicly.
	3	Not found.
	7	Out of time.
Work Continuity	16	Detailed with learning targets/expectations, differ by grade, sometimes plans not detailed.
	24	Vague plans, optional resources, no specifics found, login sometimes needed for access.
	4	Not found.
	10	Out of time.
Accommodation Support	18	Info available in other languages, community resources, free meal info, mental health support, SEL info, frequently no ELL or IEP plans.
	26	Some info in Spanish, sometimes free meal info and community resources provided, some mental health support provided, frequently no ELL or IEP plans.
	3	Not found.
	7	Out of time.
Instructional Time	15	Lesson plans outlined by grade, info clear, activities/assignments planned by time slots.
	8	Vague, no specifics found, assignments provided without required times.
	20	Not found.
	11	Out of time.

Usability

When remote learning plans were easy to access and navigate, we found the following characteristics:

- Learning plan is its own tab on the main district site and/or clearly linked as a static part of the site (i.e. not on a carousel)
- Located at the top of the home page, not on a carousel.
- It did not take multiple clicks to get to the plan
- Components of the plan were all in one place (ie not scattered across different places on the site) and is entirely viewable online (i.e. not only in a downloadable pdf)

Internet and device access

When the category of internet and device access was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Phone and email helpdesk contacts for families to contact with resources for access to internet
- Working with community partners (e.g. libraries) and businesses for access
- A frequently asked questions (FAQ) page
- Contacts provided for device repair and service
- Some language about the issue of access itself
- Mobile hotspots mentioned
- Basic tech troubleshooting tips
- Description of the types of tech support they can provide and the types they cannot
- Use of running Google docs so could be easily updated

Online learning experience

When the category of online learning experience was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Gathering feedback (via a survey, etc.) from students and families on the experience and also reported back findings from the survey
- Specific descriptions of platforms and where to find more resources on how to use, including how to access support
- Recognition of social/emotional interaction with learning

Staff access

When the category of staff access was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Specific information on when and how frequently staff will communicate with whom
- Remote office hours available
- Multiple ways to communicate with staff (phone, email, chat, etc) and preferences noted
- Contact info for specific staff
- Information on particular platforms (e.g. Google meet)
- Mixed patterns on whether it is better or not to have grade-specific communication preferences, versus one across the whole district)

Communication of expectations for learning

When the category of communication of expectations for learning was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Similar to work continuity, expectations are transparent about not trying to replicate traditional (i.e. non-COVID impacted) school
- Expectations are tangible, specific, clearly listed
- Learning plans might be in a dropdown menu
- Grade leveled expectations are specified
- Time frames/dates for particular expectations (see example below)

At-Home Learning Checklist
Elementary School
GRADE 5

EAU CLAIRE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

www.ecasd.us/At-Home-Learning

While lessons are important, your health and safety come first. During this time, it is easy and normal for adults and children to become overwhelmed with emotions and grief. Grief is a response to any loss, including death, employment, routines, relationships, and social connections. Everyone will experience this in different ways. We care about you. We have resources to support you. Check out the **Take Care of Your Family** section of the ECASD At Home learning webpage, by clicking here.

Time|	Topic	Overview
Ongoing	Social Emotional Learning	School staff will connect with students on a regular basis. (Possible options: phone, video, email, social app, shared documents)
30 minutes per day (150 minutes per week)	Writing	Your teacher will assign you prompts to give you a variety of things to write about. The prompts will incorporate the types of writing we completed this year (opinion, information, narrative). The goal is to type a half of a page or write a full notebook page in 10 minutes. Your writing should demonstrate fifth grade expectations (grammar, punctuation, elaboration, spelling, etc.).
	Reading	Your teacher will assign different types of literature and information texts (including social studies and science topics) where you will respond, applying different reading standards. You will independently read and/or listen to texts or stories. By practicing reading you will increase your vocabulary and fluency and apply foundational skills.
20 minutes per day (100 minutes per week)	Math	Your teacher will provide activities that strengthen your understanding of Grade 5 math concepts: • Fractions and decimals • Fluency with multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction math facts Your teacher will support learning of new concepts for reading, writing, simplifying, and evaluating expressions.
10 minutes per day (50 minutes per week)	Music, Art, & Physical Education	Music: Your teacher will share a variety of ways for students to make/create music. Your teacher will also share a variety of ways for students to make musical connections. Art: Your art teacher will assign you a weekly lesson to give you a variety of things to create and opportunities to express your feelings. Our goal is for you to spend 15 minutes or more per week engaged in art activities. We will be focusing on the Elements of Art; line, shape, form, color, value, texture, and space. Each week you will have options to explore a new element with minimal supplies needed. Physical Education: Your Phy Ed teacher will provide you a variety of physical activities and games to play either inside or outside of your home, needing minimal equipment or toys to play. These activities will help our bodies to stay healthy, and our minds to stay happy! The goal is to play each suggested activity for 15 minutes per week however, we recommend children are active and moving for extended times every day.

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Bonus Activities	• Independent Reading (60 minutes per day is recommended, but not required). Fifth graders have built up to 30 minutes of reading stamina in one sitting. Ask your teacher or media specialist for ways to access more books from home. • Physical Education: Additional skills and bonus activities will be included each week for children who would like to extend their movement beyond 15 minutes and continue practicing learned skills from this school year.

Work continuity

When the category of work continuity was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Some had a video tour of the page
- Transparent about expectations in the very imperfect conditions everyone is dealing with (e.g. reinforce learning, not trying to replicate school)
- Specific information about what will happen with grading
- Explains how work will be shared, how frequently, and where
- Learning targets listed with lesson plans
- Very specific directions for either in person learning material pick up or virtual

Accommodation support

When the category of accommodation support was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Direct contact information for families to contact school or district staff for support
- Resources for translation assistance, and sometimes materials or plan are translated itself (see example below)
- The particular district or school person/department responsible for accommodation support is identified with contact info
- Specific plans for how IEP meetings will be conducted
- FAQ document

> "Building Community Through Education"
>
> IN THIS RESOURCE:
>
> PK-5 AT-HOME LEARNING PLANS
>
> 6-12 AT-HOME LEARNING PLANS
>
> (NOTE: The above bookmarks link to content within this document. The document must be downloaded to activate the bookmarks. Otherwise, simply scroll through this document to find each section.)
>
> ESPAÑOL | HMOOB | KISWAHILI | عربى | 中文 | ESOL (summarized)

Instructional time

When the category of instructional time was both mentioned and specifically accounted for in the remote learning plan, we found the following patterns:

- Recommended ballpark of minutes per day that are grade/age-dependent, some with references or rationale
- Some with specifics for prioritizing certain content areas
- Some with sample daily plans

Also see this related review of the literature related to instructional time prepared by the WMCC.

Table 3: Ratings of Learning Plan Categories Across District Sample, by District Type (n=59)

Category	Rating	Total # Districts	# City	# Suburb	# Town	# Rural	# Tribal
Level of Usability	Excellent	12	3	4	2	2	1
	Fair	18	8	5	2	3	0
	Difficult	23	6	2	3	10	2
	Information Not Available	6	0	1	1	3	1
Internet & Device Access	Mentioned & Plan Described	32	14	9	4	4	1
	Mentioned Only	11	1	0	2	6	2
	Not Mentioned	7	2	1	1	3	0
	Not Observed	3	0	1	1	1	0
Online Learning Experience	Mentioned & Plan Described	24	8	6	3	5	2
	Mentioned Only	24	7	5	4	8	0
	Not Mentioned	4	0	1	1	1	1
	Not Observed	2	1	0	0	1	0
Staff Access	Mentioned & Plan Described	21	8	4	3	5	1
	Mentioned Only	22	5	6	4	5	2
	Not Mentioned	6	1	0	1	4	0
	Not Observed	5	3	1	0	1	0
Communication Expectations for Learning	Mentioned & Plan Described	25	8	5	5	6	1
	Mentioned Only	19	3	3	3	8	2
	Not Mentioned	3	1	1	0	1	0
	Not Observed	7	5	2	0	0	0
Work Continuity	Mentioned & Plan Described	16	5	3	2	5	1
	Mentioned Only	24	7	5	5	5	2

	Not Mentioned	4	0	0	1	3	0
	Not Observed	10	5	3	0	2	0
Accommodation Support	Mentioned & Plan Described	18	10	4	3	1	0
	Mentioned Only	26	7	4	4	9	2
	Not Mentioned	3	0	1	0	1	1
	Not Observed	7	0	2	1	4	0
Instructional Time	Mentioned & Plan Described	15	7	2	2	3	1
	Mentioned Only	8	0	2	4	2	0
	Not Mentioned	20	5	4	2	8	1
	Not Observed	11	5	3	0	2	1

Digging Deeper into Remote Learning Plans

The following are general reflections from the analysis that suggest important areas for providing LEAs with support.

Concerns related to equity

- We did not see many materials, plans, or guidance specific to EL students and very few districts have the remote learning or resources in multiple languages.
- Although most districts provided devices (e.g. Chromebooks, iPads) to students and informed families about companies that have deals for internet access/WiFi hotspots in parking lots, internet access continues to be a serious concern.
- Occasionally, plans framed the intentions of families or students in ways that could be changed to improve the inclusivity of the online space (e.g. stating "we know you're trying your best" as opposed to "students choosing to not do work").

District needs

- Translation services to support access to informational and instructional materials could be of great support to districts.
- Consultation related to principles of basic web functionality (e.g. 1:1 tech assistance call with librarians or web designers). Districts might need help on how to organize their distance learning "plan" into one organized web page and to clearly link it directly on the district home page
- Specific guidance on instructional time in remote learning contexts could be useful, as districts were least likely to have mapped out plans in this category
- Rural district plans tended to mostly "Mention" different categories rather than have detailed plans outlined. Support and mentorship for rural districts could be helpful.