

THE ESSENTIAL EIGHT

Leading in a Virtual Learning Environment

“A new leadership order has emerged which has no leadership standards, no preparation or development There are no precedents, no ring-binders, no blueprints to help school leaders through the current maelstrom that is COVID19.”¹ In such times, those who are responsible for evaluating school leaders should not rely on the same tools they used prior to the pandemic. In this resource you will find questions and prompts that will help you focus on evaluating how school leaders are rising to the challenge of leading during this crisis.



ADAPTABILITY

- How is the school leader creating a nimble school culture that is able to easily respond to and adapt to a quickly changing external environment?
- Have school leaders surveyed parents about their different scheduling challenges? How are the uniquely different needs of families being met? (i.e. varied work schedules, varied levels of education, and different needs for support)
- How are changes clearly communicated to the board, staff, students and parents in a way that is easy to understand and respond to? Where can individuals turn if they have questions they need answered?
- How does the school leader ensure that best practices are quickly adopted and implemented?



SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING STAFF

- How is the school leader supporting staff so they can be successful in a virtual learning environment (VLE)?
- What steps are being taken to ensure teachers are comfortable teaching in a VLE?
- What types of professional development opportunities is the school leader providing to help strengthen the teachers' capacity to teach in a VLE?
- Does the school leader meet with and solicit feedback from teachers on a regular basis to gauge how they are doing in a VLE and where they may need additional support?
- What plans or strategies are in place when a teacher needs to be absent?



TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY

- Has the school leader spent time researching the best technology platforms and tools to use in educating students in a VLE?
- Does the school leader provide teachers with time to explore and collaborate with other teachers regarding potential virtual learning tools?
- Is the school leader able to proficiently use the technology platforms and tools being used by the teachers?
- Has the school leader worked with teachers to develop digital etiquette standards when participating in a VLE?



COMMUNICATION

- Does the school leader have a plan to use technology to communicate with parents on a regular basis?
- Is the school leader using multiple methods of communication, such as e-mails, newsletters, texts, videos and phone calls?
- Is the school leader developing and disseminating parent and student surveys on a regular basis to better understand what is going well and what and how things could be improved?
- If parents or students have a concern, do they understand how to contact the school leader and do they receive a response in a timely manner?

1. Alma Harris & Michelle Jones (2020) COVID 19 – school leadership in disruptive times, School Leadership & Management, 40:4, 243-247, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479



SCHOOL CLIMATE

- How is the school leader addressing the issue of equity in a VLE? What strategies are in place to ensure all students have access to a quality education in a virtual environment?
- What steps is the school leader taking to ensure a positive school culture in a VLE?
- What strategies has the school leader implemented to ensure students are engaged and learning, such as strategies for reaching out to and reengaging students who have gone silent?
- What strategies are being used to make sure students still feel connected as part of a community even though they are learning virtually?
- How are students who are struggling with social-emotional stress and mental health issues identified and supported?
- How is the school leader making sure that students and staff are safe in their VLE from hacking, inappropriate content, data loss and internet access interruptions?
- What adjustments has the school leader made to the student code of conduct to conform with the VLE?



SCHOOL OPERATIONS

- How has the school schedule been adapted to accommodate an online learning environment? What is the balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning time? Does the schedule include common planning and collaboration time for content and grade level teams?
- Is the school's curriculum fully covered in the VLE? Do adaptations need to be made?
- What is the school's plan for providing students with the needed access to technology and technology support? Is there a plan for students if they are having problems with connectivity and their technology devices?
- What system is the school using to communicate student progress?
- What support services are provided to unique learners who are learning in a VLE to ensure the school is still in compliance with state and federal laws, such as special education, ELL, homeless and gifted and talented students?
- What is the school's plan for distributing meals?
- How has the school adapted its enrollment processes/procedures?
- What plans are in place to support onboarding and orientation of students new to the VLE?



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Is the school leader evaluating and providing teachers with feedback regarding their classroom instruction? Is the school leader reviewing lesson plans and communications to parents? Is the school leader conducting regular visits to the teacher's virtual classrooms or listening to recorded lessons?
- How is the school leader supporting teachers as they organize their virtual classrooms, such as providing technology tools, models of best practices, and opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues?
- Is the school leader using the information gathered from "virtual walk-throughs" to provide professional development opportunities or instructional coaching that could strengthen instruction in a VLE?
- What strategies are being used to identify students that are struggling with the content or technology in a VLE and what steps are being taken to provide them with additional support?
- What strategies and tools are being used to support teachers in differentiating their instruction in the VLE?



ACCOUNTABILITY

- In a VLE, what steps is the school leader taking to make sure the school's mission and vision are implemented and operationalized?
- How is the school leader making sure the school's educational and non-educational goals are met in a VLE?
- Has the school leader developed an assessment schedule and a plan for delivering students assessments virtually? How are the results of these assessments shared with the board, teachers, students and parents?
- Has the school leader developed a plan for evaluating teachers and providing them with feedback in a VLE? Has the school leader adapted evaluation tools for the VLE?

In addition to adjusting the lens through which you view the evaluation of your school leader, the National Charter Schools Institute urges you to ensure your school leader knows that you value and set the highest priority on their self-care. When leader's health and well-being is compromised, they will be unable to lead their team through these most challenging of times.