

Supporting Social Studies Distance Learning

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) defines distance learning as “students have access to appropriate educational materials and receive daily interactions with their licensed teachers.” Supporting social studies learning in the period where students are working from home provides some challenges and opportunities. This document builds on the delivery systems outlined in the MDE Guidance on Distance Learning and applies them to distance learning in social studies.

What is at Issue?

As [schools close](#) as part of public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, educators are faced with how to support the diverse needs of all learners when students are not in school. States and districts must contend with:

- unequal access to or experience with technology;
- issues around digital safety and privacy;
- diverse affective/emotional responses to personal lives and the pandemic;
- equity in access and meaningful participation for diverse learners and their families, including emerging multilingual students, students receiving special education services, and students in poverty;
- equitable access to meals, utilities, health services, or shelter;
- responsibilities learners and families hold, such as providing for their families’ safety and well-being, caretaking, work, and community responsibilities;
- access to safe and supportive learning spaces; and
- access to peers and/or adults to support learning to make sense of the world around them.

Why It Matters

Students are facing significant change during this period of extended school closure. School communities should be cognizant of the increased situational stress on students, families, and educators as well as an overload of media. School communities must navigate and prioritize short-term and long-term needs, distance learning options, manageable lists of quality activities and resources, and trade-offs of instructional decisions during school closures. Efforts will need to adapt as this situation unfolds.

Things to consider

- The physical and emotional well-being of students, educators, families, and communities are the priority at this time. State and district leaders should consider how they can focus on supporting meaningful, purposeful learning while prioritizing social-emotional and health needs, including the need for social

connectedness during a time of isolation. State and district leaders should lead by example in supporting healthy behaviors for themselves and one another.

- Equity of learning opportunities for all students must also be a priority. This includes providing the support that individual students need to accomplish the standards and their corresponding benchmarks. Help educators and caregivers make purposeful, equitable decisions about how they leverage resources to support learning, and student participation in distance learning.

Features of Supportive Resources

Consider how materials or approaches you are suggesting can be used to:

- Support flexible scheduling and limited technology access.
- Encourage students to engage in activities that already happen in their lives with materials that families already have. While public or outdoor learning spaces may be an asset, recommendations for being outside should attend to current social distancing guidance.
- Allow for meaningful social studies activities, experiences, projects, and/or inquiries. Have students develop questions, investigations, and evidence-based explanations for occurrences in their lives, and other sources.
- Help students make explicit connections to their interests and identities. Bring in the culture and setting of students. How might this unique experience of distance learning be a springboard for connecting to resources that enhance college, career, and civic life readiness?
- Support students in self-reflection related to content and process to support their social studies learning.
- Invite family members to be a partner in students' learning. Consider the multiple home and homeless situations and the demands on families for caregiving, working from home, and shared resources.
- Provide students with choices for how they engage, what they investigate, or how they demonstrate learning.
- Encourage, support, and facilitate first-language family participation in learning. Student home languages should be valued as an asset to social studies learning.
- Exercise sensitivity when referencing the current pandemic as a possible topic to investigate.
- Focus on what is manageable - for you, the students, and their families. Extend compassion to those you interact with during high-stress times, including yourself.

During this time, learning experiences should emphasize...

Flexible goals and structures for learning

- **extended time** for learning and reflection
- use of **commonly available materials**
- **purposeful selection** of learning outcomes
- allowing students to **explore their interests**
- **meaningful, manageable, purposeful tasks, readings, and projects**
- **opportunities to learn without the use of devices or the internet**

Purposeful teacher-student interactions

- **optional** opportunities to connect with teachers and peers **virtually and at a variety of times**
- teachers providing **coaching, feedback, and encouragement**
- encouraging **students to engage in learning and reflection with their families and communities**
- encouraging **self-reflection** on what students learn and how they learn it

Authentic social studies learning in the home setting

- **connecting social studies problems to daily activities**
- asking students to **identify relevant problems** in their lives
- allowing students to **deeply explore problems of interest** through investigation and inquiry

Resources

Distance learning resources from the Center for Social Studies Education (CSSE) -

The CSSE is a collaboration of the Minnesota Department of Education ([MDE](#)) and the following statewide organizations to promote excellence in social studies education, and support educators with standards implementation, resources, and opportunities for professional development:

- Learning Law and Democracy Foundation ([LLAD](#))
- Minnesota Alliance for Geographic Education ([MAGE](#))
- Minnesota Council for History Education ([MNCHE](#))
- Minnesota Council for the Social Studies ([MCSS](#))
- Minnesota Council on Economic Education ([MCEE](#))
- Minnesota Historical Society ([MNHS](#))
- Minnesota Humanities Center ([MHC](#))

Select distance learning resources from the CSSE are posted on the [Minnesota Council or the Social Studies' website](#).

Inquiry-based Instruction (CSSE) –

Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-12	Grades 9-12
<p>Infographics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades K-2 	<p>Infographics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 3-5 Civics • Grades 3-5 Economics • Grades 3-5 Geography • Grades 3-5 History 	<p>Infographics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades 6-8 Civics • Grades 6-8 Economics • Grades 6-8 Geography • Grades 6-8 History 	<p>Disciplinary Inquiry Videos for Students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civics: Guide Video with Transcript • Economics: Guide Video with Transcript • Geography: Guide Video with Transcript • History: Guide Video with Transcript

More distance learning resources –

- Doing Social Studies Video Series - This video series supports implementation of the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards for Social Studies.
 - The K-5 videos provide benchmark-by-benchmark explanations along with suggested instructional strategies for educators and activities for students.
 - The 6-12 videos offer effective social studies instructional strategies.
- Disciplinary Thinking –
See posters: [Elementary - Think Like A](#); [Middle School - Think Like A](#); [High School - Think Like A](#)

Questions? Contact: mde.academic-standards@state.mn.us

This document was adapted from *Supporting Students' Social Studies Learning during COVID-19 School Closures* developed by members of the Council of State Social Studies Specialists (CS4) and [Supporting Students Science Learning during COVID-19 School Closures](#) from the Council of State Science Supervisors. Some language was also borrowed from *Supporting Student Learning During Extended School Closures*, forthcoming from the [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#).