

# FCFT Principles for Support Staff in a Virtual Reopening

It is clear that online learning in FCPS this fall must be different than it was in the spring in order to make it a success district-wide. We must use our support staff as part of the solution to provide a successful Distance Learning experience for all FCPS students. As we head toward a virtual start, we must create a learning environment where, with thoughtful planning, training, and execution, our students can thrive and receive the high-quality education they deserve. This can be done by intentionally using our support staff, from Instructional Assistants (IAs) and bus drivers to food service workers, secretaries, and custodians, in capacities that meet the needs of FCPS students. This work should be led by support staff, teachers, and administrators collaborating at each school. After hosting town halls with hundreds of support staff, surveying our membership, and engaging with our Support Staff Committee, FCFT has the following recommendations.

## Classroom Support

1. IAs can and should play an essential role in making virtual learning a success. They can help teachers and students with online tools, videos, breakouts, one-on-ones, and chats. They also can support overextended/busy parents or guardians with technology and study halls.
2. Training should be provided before the start of school in Blackboard, Google Classroom, SeaStar, etc., to all support staff involved in teaching. Support staff will need laptops and high speed internet connection. The district should provide MiFi devices or reimburse for home internet so staff can collaborate with teachers to make online learning a success.
3. Support staff should be allowed the same access to the building as teachers in order to utilize computers and WiFi.
4. Teachers can collaborate with IAs by sharing lesson plans with them before class so they can be ready to jump in as needed to support students. Teachers and IAs can work together as a team to ensure all student needs are met.
5. Some schools have a “lead IA” position, which could be expanded to all schools to help teachers and IAs know the role of IAs.
6. Support staff can support breakout groups and interventions (with perhaps 3-5 kids) both before and after on-line instruction. IAs also can work with counselors and teachers to make virtual interventions more successful.
7. Teachers and support staff can collaborate on holding Portrait of a Graduate sessions at the end of classes, where students who had met the expectations of the class could explore and develop new passions and skills (e.g. learning cello, guitar, or creative

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writing) based on their individual interests.

8. Class sizes should not surpass recommended student-to-teacher ratios, but when they are on the larger end of the spectrum, support staff can play a vital role in leading smaller breakout sessions that maintain the dynamic, student-centered learning environment possible only in small classes.
9. IAs can read questions aloud to students, help manage the class, and help with technical issues.
10. IAs can help their teachers by creating documents to provide additional educational resources for families to use with their children.
11. IAs can hold virtual study/homework support sessions at various times throughout the day. Many households have limited connectivity and several students may need to use a single computer. Providing help at multiple times throughout the day is critical to ensure all students are able to fully engage in virtual learning and receive individualized attention and support.
12. Support staff from many backgrounds can all play an important role in the classroom as guest speakers (demo an age-appropriate recipe, participate in a career day, read a book, host a book club, etc.)

### Social/Emotional Support for Students and Families

13. IAs and other support staff can support students and families during virtual learning with consistent contact via email and telephone calls, especially given that many of our support staff are multilingual and can make connections with families in a variety of languages in collaboration with teachers/clinical staff.
14. Support staff can facilitate virtual social and educational sessions with and between students. These could include organizational and executive functioning skills sessions aimed at helping students with problems in these areas (such as ADHD and learning disabilities) to improve their study skills and other abilities that are especially important in a virtual school environment. IAs can be trained on the curriculum to host such sessions. Support staff can also facilitate unstructured rapport-building social sessions to give students a safe space to hang out together online, since many students are missing their peers without the contact that comes with a physical classroom. IAs can attend “Kid Talks.”
15. Support staff can be effective liaisons between students/families and school social/emotional supports such as social workers, counselors, etc., creating a web of feedback between families and social/emotional supports. This form of passing issues along to a counselor is exactly what IAs do in person, but the relationship-building would happen through regular check-in phone calls or calling about attendance issues.

16. Support staff can assist students, troubleshoot computer issues, and help parents with students' login information, given the requisite training as mentioned above.
17. PHAs and PTs can provide student support over the phone or virtual learning platform – calling, reading stories, helping students manage their health, and providing highly individualized emotional support. Intimate care has built that kind of relationship and particularly focuses on handling anxiety, which is especially relevant at the moment. PHAs and PTs also can collaborate with counselors, administrators, and instructional staff to help supply accommodations for students with 504s and IEPs.
18. All support staff can send communications (e.g. physical mail) to parents and families to keep them in the loop and connected socially. For example, staff can send notes of encouragement/"Thinking of You" to students (particularly to students new to Fairfax County or to a specific school) on behalf of their educators.
19. Support staff can call homes to check in on students who aren't attending classes to problem-solve, make sure they can attend, and connect them to other social-emotional, mental health, or other services they may need. They can also observe and participate in family-led learning to be able to better understand and support a student.
20. Support staff can visit families at home and conduct socially distanced one-on-one support for students who need in-person attention.
21. Support staff can provide wellness checks to students on a weekly basis.

### Non-Classroom Support Staff

22. Buildings can be used as a space for essential childcare. Support staff can be used to help staff the childcare.
23. Custodians should continue their regular building duties and summer deep-cleaning work, in addition to getting buildings prepared for a possible reopening. If elementary schools are to open first, then some custodians assigned to high schools and middle schools could be reassigned to elementary schools.
24. If community sites are being used to feed students and families, then custodians, food service workers, and bus drivers can work outside their schools and help support the work at those sites.
25. Bus drivers and attendants can establish a delivery service including:
  - a. Food
  - b. Supplies
  - c. In-person supports and interventions on a small scale
26. Administrative assistants can work as back-ups for teachers. For example, they can help monitor chats and help address any technical issues that arise.

27. Bus drivers can assist food service workers to expand the meal buses and perhaps employ a mobile version of the keypad students typically use to buy lunches (lunch accounts automatically adjust payment taken out for FRM). There also may be students not on the FRM list who want to buy school meals. At least one cafeteria manager must be present for food to be served, and the county has about 215 of them, so meal delivery/pickup could be expanded well beyond the roughly 37 sites covered in the spring.
28. Buses can be outfitted as mobile internet hotspots for students with connectivity issues and parked at strategic locations on a predetermined schedule.
29. School staff can be trained in contact tracing and used to help contain the spread of coronavirus.