

5 Ways to Support Learning From Home

Why Successful Online Learning Requires More Than Just Technology

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As the global health crisis continues, educational institutions around the world are redesigning the learning experience and blended learning is quickly becoming the new normal. Some students have returned to the classroom, but many others are learning through a hybrid approach — face-to-face instruction combined with online learning. And for others, learning is only happening virtually from home. With few signs that the pandemic is slowing down, it's possible future surges may further impact where and how students learn and that a return to normalcy at elementary, secondary and higher education institutions is still far off.

Educators and students are participating in a sweeping and sudden shift in the use of technology to learn. It's key to driving a successful blended learning model. But technology alone is not enough. Students also need a healthy environment that will enhance their learning experience and access to the tools and furniture they need to thrive. Creating the right physical space designed for learning to happen is critical.

Here are five things you can do to improve the learning experience:

1. **Identify a space where learning can happen that communicates, “This is where I learn.”**

Whether it's in a dorm room or your home, it's important for students to mentally switch from “home mode” to “school mode” to motivate their engagement. It doesn't have to necessarily be a dedicated space — it can be a desk in the corner of a room or a table that needs to be converted back to a dining room after 5 p.m (or used as a home office for parents when not in use). If possible, use different spaces for different types of learning: Sit at a desk to write a paper, use a tall whiteboard for solving math problems. The experience is less likely to feel stale if the student is able to change their environment and they can move throughout their day.

2. **Let the student become the designer.**

Learning is more likely to be successful if the student is given the opportunity to design their space. Not only can this be an incredibly rich and important learning process that excites and motivates learners, it will allow them to self discover what works best for them. The addition of meaningful objects and pictures will also help them feel more connected to the space and more likely to be engaged.

3. **Don't underestimate the importance of ergonomics and comfort.** Most people's homes are not equipped with furniture designed to support work or learning. It won't take long before distraction sets in because the student becomes uncomfortable, starts to fidget and can't focus. They need good ergonomic seating meant for long-term sitting. The Steelcase Node chair with mobile tablet arm is a great solution for smaller spaces. The encouragement of movement is also important, even

micromovements make a difference. Consider a sit/stand desk to change postures and proper lighting to eliminate eye strain.

- i. **Add places to display thinking.** Learners need to be able to think through ideas and easily express themselves. By adding whiteboards to vertical surfaces, they can easily display and share their work with others. It can also help them keep organized by providing a place to display upcoming projects, work in progress and completed assignments. It can also help teach and practice self-management, time management, prioritization and organization skills.
- ii. **Add biophilic elements to improve mood, enhance creativity and cognitive function.** Research suggests wellbeing and health improve when we embed elements such as natural light and materials, plants and color into spaces. Natural daylight has been linked to higher test scores and students who have access to views of nature achieve better learning outcomes. Multisensory and enriched environments engage our senses as well as cognitive, motor and social skills.

Like working from home, learning from home can be challenging when you don't have a comfortable and productive work environment. Whether you're writing an essay or developing a marketing strategy, the space where you work makes a big difference.