Best Practices for Creating Take-Home Packets to Support Distance Learning

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Educators across the globe are carefully considering how best to serve their students during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders in the Pacific region are considering developing take-home packets to support students' at-home learning. Take-home packets can be used as a primary mode of instruction during at-home learning and as a supplemental resource when school is back in session.

Questions for Decision Makers to Consider When Developing Take-Home Packets

- What should learners be able to know as a result from using the packets?
- How will instructors know that learners have achieved the desired results?
- How will students communicate questions and concerns to teachers if they don't understand the assignment?
- How will teachers receive feedback from students on their experience?[1]
- How can positive relationships between students, their peers, and their teachers be maintained to support social and emotional wellbeing?
- How will students be taught skills such as organization, planning, time management, and mindfulness to help their social and emotional wellbeing during distance learning?[2]
- Are there concerns about copyright issues?
- Are there any partnerships with textbook publishers and other education vendors that can support ways to provide free resources?
- Are materials unit-specific and based on the planned curriculum?
- How often will materials be distributed?[3]
- How will students obtain the materials?

Strategies for Designing and Distributing Take-Home Packets and Assessing Student Learning

Communication

- Provide a virtual orientation with families when take-home packets are first delivered to collaboratively discuss expectations.
- Outline expectations and methods for students to submit work by specifying a timeline for submission and options for late submissions.[4]
- Provide clear directions that both students and families can understand, and if possible, translate them into students' home languages.[5]
- Send activity instructions weekly via text blasts or in print format distributed simultaneously with any necessary tools and activities for lessons.

Considerations

- Before creating packets, identify essential standards and benchmarks for students to meet. Carefully design activities to align to the appropriate curriculum, address the most essential learning standards, and assess for understanding. (Please see page 2 for more information.)
- Ensure that activities take into account the varied use of learning modalities and access to resources that students have available in their homes or immediate surroundings.
- Consider how these packets can incorporate students' backgrounds and experiences through personalized and project-based learning.[6]
- If possible, incorporate student ownership and responsibility in the development of take-home packets, such as collaboratively designing the packets, discussing how to best assess progress with both students and families, and engaging in continuous improvement.[7]

Creation

- Organize materials so they are easy to read and include visuals to facilitate understanding, providing definitions for technical words. Including sequential organization of content can help activities build upon each other.[8]
- Define learning objectives to help students know what they are expected to learn and how they will be evaluated on their learning.[9]
- Include any necessary tools for activities and lessons in the packets. For example, students may need mathematics tools like graph paper or a protractor, specialized paper for handwriting assignments, or other materials needed for art projects or presentations.[10]
- Incorporate more than one way to accurately measure students' knowledge, skills, and competencies. Because connectivity constraints may eliminate computer-based options for assessment, teachers can incorporate quizzes, areas for reflection, and other assessment methods into the packets, and collect them weekly or monthly to assess students' learning.[11]
- Incorporate experiential activities for students that build in interactive hands-on learning to support a learning environment that is multisensory, active, and that supports a variety of individual learning needs. For example, consider implementing home-based projects such as cooking, woodworking, and place-based learning activities.[12]

Project-Based Learning Strategies

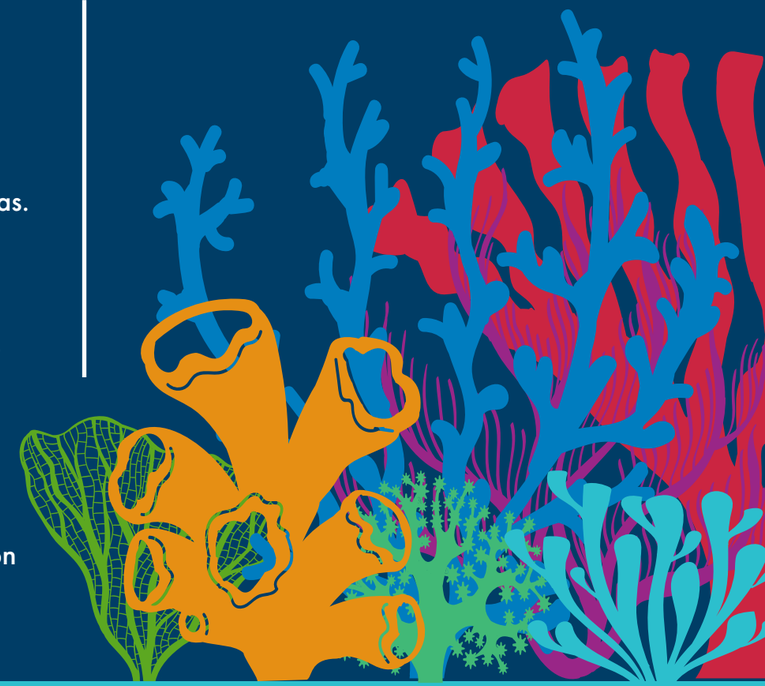
Project-based learning, or PBL, activities are an example of something you might include in a take-home packet. PBL is one method that educators can use to design motivating and interactive activities. PBL focuses on exercising students' academic skills within meaningful contexts, pushing students to design a process to address a problem, access the information needed to solve the problem, and come up with a solution.[13]

Benefits of using PBL in take-home packets include:[14]

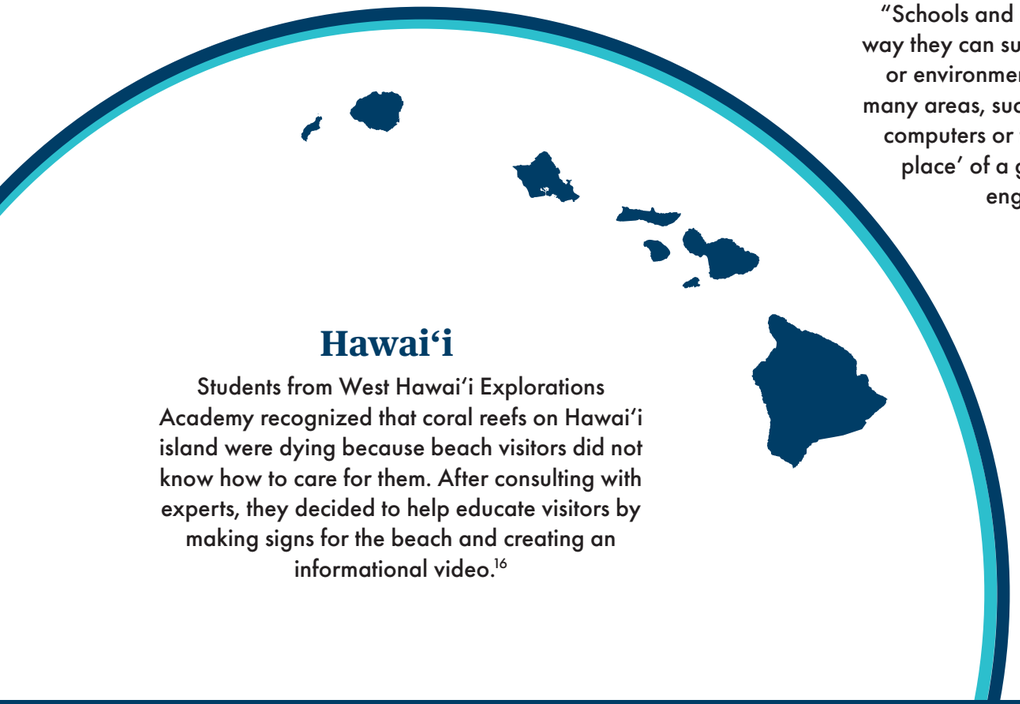
- flexibility & creativity
- student choice & motivation
- complexity & differentiation

PBL design principles that can be adapted to take-home packets include:[15]

- Create a product that answers a driving question that draws upon multiple content areas.
- Provide opportunities for student reflection, and teacher feedback and assessment, by including open-ended questions for reflection.
- Include directions for students to reach out to their community and present products to authentic public audiences. Students can take advantage of different technologies, such as phone, messaging, or social media, if in-person meetings are not possible.



Project-Based Learning in the Pacific Region



Hawai'i

Students from West Hawai'i Explorations Academy recognized that coral reefs on Hawai'i island were dying because beach visitors did not know how to care for them. After consulting with experts, they decided to help educate visitors by making signs for the beach and creating an informational video.[16]

Yap, Federated States of Micronesia

"Schools and school systems are having to rethink and redesign the way they can support student learning when disease outbreaks, health, or environmental events prevent students from attending school. In many areas, such as those in Yap, students do not have access to home computers or the internet. Although the packets will never 'take the place' of a good teacher, their purpose is to help keep students engaged in learning until school can resume."

- Ms. Pamela Legdesog, Director of Education, Yap State Department of Education

"These will not only help through COVID-19, but we can use them for other challenges, like typhoons... Students can use these packets to actually stay at home and work instead of not being able to continue with their school work."

- Mr. Dominic Fanasog, Professional Development Coordinator, Yap State Department of Education

Aligning Take-Home Packets with Curriculum Standards

It is important to design packets to align with grade-level curriculum and standards. The following steps can help educators foster this alignment:

- Break down grade-level curriculum into measurable learning objectives that include the knowledge and skills students need to learn.[17]
- Prepare instructional course materials that help students learn the objectives you have outlined. Be sure materials take students from where they are to where they need to be.[18]
- Prepare assessments (both formative and summative) that will allow both students and teachers to assess student progress, gaps in learning, and mastery of content.[19]

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