



Connecting in a Virtual Classroom

“To teach, we must reach.”

The most powerful tool used within the human family is *Connection*.

As teachers, it is embedded within our daily duties to build connections with families and children in our school family, as well as support children in building healthy connections with others. Science tells us that healthy, strong brains are born and developed through healthy, strong relationships.

As the journey of virtual First Class Pre-K begins, it is important for teachers to recognize that building connections will be different than anything we have experienced prior. We have the opportunity to grow in new teaching practices, and avenues to connect.

In any virtual pre-k setting, it is our responsibility to implement a new standard of developmentally appropriate practices to support each student and their family. We must be willing to be flexible, innovative, creative, and responsive to the needs of our students and families while we take ownership of these new strategies.

We have an opportunity to build authentic connections on a virtual platform, not just within a traditional in-person classroom environment. Many are focused on academics and learning. Research demonstrates that the four-year-old child’s time in First Class Pre-K takes place during a delicate time of brain development, and as teachers, we must focus on whole-child development for building foundations within the child for future relationships.

First Class Pre-K has organized evidence-based strategies as suggestions to “*first reach each, before you teach.*” A focus on willingness and individual ownership are the driving forces behind a menu of ideas to build relationships across three key connections in the virtual classroom. This menu cannot replace authentic connections, but it can be used a resource to build connection in a virtual classroom environment.

Areas of Connection		
Teacher: Family	Teacher: Child	Child: Child
<p>Family support is vital to be successful, so the child will benefit fully. The foundation of Early Childhood is human connection. Through connections with family each day, we will create meaningful experiences. As the teacher, connecting with families is a priority.</p>	<p>Connecting with children drives us as teachers. We love to see the spark in their eyes when new learning happens. Some children have had little to no experience with teachers. Their backgrounds will be diverse and their experiences as well. Connection strategies will vary between individual children. You have 18 little hearts waiting for you; you’ve got this!</p>	<p>We can’t forget this piece! How can you build connections between children when they have never met? This is a challenge we are all learning and growing through. During this time your focus to build your classroom family is important. Helping children learn about one another and develop friendships will create a sense of safety and belonging. Through building these friendships, we will transition into the classroom seamlessly when the time comes.</p>



Connecting in a Virtual Classroom, cont.

"To teach, we must reach."

As a teacher, your authenticity must shine in everything you do to solidify connections with your students and their families. As you look through the menus, choose some connection activities from each area, and modify the activity to reflect your practice and comfort level. Activities will vary in length of time to implement and complete.

The *impact* of the connection activities is what is most important. Focus on connection activities in all three areas to build the foundations for relationships within the school family. For yourself, your children and your families: take your time, be authentic, and be present.

Share your plan with your Region Coach, or even create your own. Ensure these pieces are in place as you navigate the learning systems and lesson plans. This fundamental piece is extremely important as you build your lesson plans with academics. **Document the strategies you will use to build connection in your lesson plan so your coach can support you on implementation.**

*** The DECA-P is a required activity from the menu. As the teacher, you will reach out to the family and complete the DECA-P using the family member's answers. Next, you will then enter the data into the DECA system.*

Virtual Meetings

Throughout your virtual learning experience, you will be using a Two-Way Video Communication platform to communicate with your students and their families (see *First Class Pre-K Remote Instruction Guidance*).

With regards to Early Childhood Education:

- Virtual video meetings should be conducted in a small group setting with 4 or less students at a time.
- It is better to meet in small groups less frequently than whole group every day.
- Incorporate movement and dance.
- Be you, be silly and bring songs - your teacher personality should be consistent from physical classroom to virtual classroom.
- Be realistic with your expectations of what a four-year-old can do via virtual/remote connection.
- Invite adults to attend video chats (a connected adult sitting with the child increases engagement).
- Be flexible with your scheduling to allow families with challenging schedules to attend.
- Have a visual schedule or a routine of what the video calls include so the students are able to predict these sessions; structure and routine creates safety.
- Be prepared before you start, just as you do in the classroom. Don't go to the carpet empty handed!

Teacher:Child Connection Strategies



Strategy	Description
Small Group Zoom	From the child survey, create voting opportunities on Zoom calls with variables such as thumbs up/ thumbs down, make a specific animal sound, or move a certain way by clapping, bouncing, or waving. Have them vote and count these votes, link children together with the same interests and don't forget to cast your vote in as well.
Create a daily check-in with children	This can be done via Zoom platform or even a google doc. The goal is that it is a brief check-in and it can be questions like: How are you feeling today? What do you want to do today? Do you have any news to share? The answer can be created into a daily newsletter then can be emailed to parents and then shared with children.
Virtual Field Trips	Using the power of the internet take the children on virtual field trips. Use a read aloud or talk about a place the children visited. Ask them if they could go anywhere where would they go? If possible, make it into a short fun virtual trip!
Feelings Chart	Make a simple feelings chart and have the children make the faces of the feelings and have them tell what makes them happy, mad, sad, scared
Spotlight a STAR student each day	The STAR Student is spotlighted with interview questions that the teachers asks the child and parent.
Question of the day or problem of the day	Send a question or problem and ask parents to send the responses, then create a letter highlighting what the responses were
Story Time	Reading a story or using a website like Vooks
Morning Meeting	Same time each day have a morning meeting with the children just like in the classroom, start slow with movement and singing as the children get used to Zoom (offer multiple choices of times for daily meetings)
Dance Party	Host a dance party and let children dance in their homes
Flat Teacher Activity	Send a cut-out of you to each child and ask them to take you through their day. Have them tape your picture to a piece of paper and draw around you the things you saw
You Draw Me and I will draw you!	Hop on Zoom with one child and ask them to draw you and you draw the child, talk your process through with the child and share the pictures. It would be a nice touch to mail your drawing of the child to them
Virtual Lunch Date	Or Breakfast or Dinner or snack- share a meal with one child at a time and talk to get to know the child, let them lead
CD Elements	Record Brain Smart Starts, I Love You Rituals and share with your children.
Schedules	When hosting a meeting, have a schedule of what your time together will be and refer to the schedule throughout the session to teach the pattern. Keep the pattern the same for zoom meetings

Child:Child Connection Strategies



Strategy	Description
Same interests Small Groups Zoom	From the child survey, group together children with a similar interest (for example: children who like the color blue). Then do an activity or song with blue. Alternate the groups based on interests from the survey.
Games	Ask the child in a small group setting to pick their favorite movement and ask the other children to copy, give everyone a turn
Class Books	Create class books virtually which can be done easily with a PowerPoint format and send to families (be sure to add their interests on their pages)
Class Tree	Create a class tree with the children and add pictures of their families as you would in the classroom, when school opens move the tree to the classroom. (be sure the class tree is visible during your Zoom meetings)
Wish You Well	Create the “Wish You Well” board and support children in wishing each other well each day
Flat Stanley for Children	Send a cut-out of a child to another child and have them take their new friend with them throughout their day. Send the cut-out with the child’s first name and things they like. Bring the two together on a Zoom call and have them share their days
Find Our Friends Bingo Game	Create a BINGO board with the pictures of your class and then ask questions to see who can find the child you are describing- I see a friend who is wearing a blue shirt, with dark hair and glasses? Who do I see?
Snack Time	Invite two children together virtually to share a snack and get to know each other and you
Dramatic Play Virtual	Create a dramatic play scenario such as restaurant, school, vet, etc. Teacher facilitates the dramatic play and allows children to pretend virtually over Zoom with small groups of children
Show and Tell	This can follow themes, specific letters, colors, likes, dislikes, the options are unlimited, and children love to share what they have around their homes. Small groups work great with this and remember to mix your small groups up so the children get to know each other as well. Be sure to share <u>your</u> special item! You may need to help children with what questions to ask so be sure you have some question starters ready to go.

Teacher:Family Connection Strategies



Strategy	Description
Talent Survey with families	Ask your families what their talents are and think how those could support your classroom community.
Technology and Time Survey	Ask your families their technology access and their schedules to allow for virtual connection
Family and teacher Conferences	Meet with your families regularly to not only check-in but also learn more about their children. Aim for these times to be around 20-30 minutes and allow families to sign up around their schedules.
Weekly Newsletters	These can be informative and fun, send them hope weekly to keep all families connected about what is happening in the school and classroom virtual community.
Ask Family to create an all about US poster	Share these virtually so each family can be highlighted
Create Family Challenges	Fun things that families can complete together and then send in pictures- make the topics broad so families can be creative together and you can see their personalities
Create a private Facebook page	A place where your classroom community can come together virtually, and ideas can be shared
Create a recipe book	OR any topic that families can send in submissions to create resources for the whole classroom (recipes, active activities when kids get cabin fever, favorite places to take children, etc) Tap into the wisdom of your families
Schedule Group Family Meetings	Think of this like virtual PTA - a time when adults can come together and talk about a topic. For some this may be their only “adult” time so schedule in the evenings for easy access
Draw a family portrait to share with class	Add in pets, grandparents, extended family, friends, a picture of all those important connections
Reflective Consultation	Request to speak to the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant when you become concerned about a child’s social emotional development or well-being. The consultation can be done via Zoom or email and will maintain confidentiality.
Virtual Calming Space	The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant assigned to your room has prepared a virtual calming space that you can share with your children and families. You may also integrate the space and activities into your curriculum. Activities include learning new breathing and calming techniques, stories about emotional regulation, and recognizing and naming emotions.