About This Guide

PLTW would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to the development of this guide:

- Dr. Kathryn Kennedy, an education consultant specializing in online, blended, and digital learning. The foundation of the guide is based on work done by Michigan Virtual™, through its Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute®, where Dr. Kennedy served as Director from 2013 - 2018.
- PLTW partners Amazon Web Services, ArcelorMittal, Chevron, Toyota, and Verizon for their generous support that has enabled PLTW to effectively serve its network of schools and districts in a distance learning environment.
- Last but not least, PLTW Team Members, who represent years of experience in the classroom and as administrators, and bring significant expertise in instructional design, activity-project-problem-based content development, student engagement, and teacher professional development.

Expanded to include additional resources, this guide was created for PLTW-certified PreK-5th grade teachers in PLTW Network Districts and Schools as they support their PreK-5th grade students and caregivers who engage with Project Lead the Way (PLTW) curriculum in online and blended learning environments. As a professional in the field, the reader should use their best judgment; this Guide is solely a reference tool that may be helpful throughout the year. The guide includes PLTW-specific recommendations for high fidelity implementation of PLTW programs as well as general information about PreK-5th grade online and blended learning. One of eight guides, this resource details the world of online learning from the perspective of the people integral to creating a supportive learning experience based on research-based best practices. The other seven guides are focused on Program Coordinators, Site Coordinators, and Administrators, Other Educators, Teachers (Grades 6-12), Caregivers (Grades PreK-5), Caregivers (Grades 6-12), Students (Grades PreK-5), and Students (Grades 6-12), and can be found HERE. Footnotes throughout feature free no-cost, practical resources and research for a more in-depth study of important aspects of online and blended teaching and learning.

Key Terms

The following words or phrases are frequently used when engaging in discussions about online learning:

Blended Learning

The Christensen Institute defines blended learning as a formal education program, in which a student learns 1) at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; 2) at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home; and 3) the modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.
Online Learning

Online learning is characterized by a structured learning environment designed to enhance and expand educational opportunities, providing instruction that is teacher-led, and may be synchronous (communication in which participants interact in the same time-space such as videoconferencing) or asynchronous (communication that is separated by time, such as email or online discussion forums), and accessed from multiple settings (in school and/or out of school buildings).

PLTW Distance Learning Support

To support you in school, at home, or anywhere in between, PLTW made enhancements in student courses and teacher resources. The student courses include a new chapter for distance learning support. This new chapter houses activities, projects, and problems (APBs) that have been enhanced for distance learning. The Teacher Guides include a new distance learning support chapter that outlines enhancements to APBs and provides guidance to the teacher for supporting students and caregivers in distance learning, including welcome letters that you can modify to suit your needs. Additionally, links to all PLTW's distance learning support resources are available.

Distance Learning Resources

In addition to the embedded distance learning support in student courses and teacher resources, PLTW is providing a variety of support (see Table 1) for the 2020-21 school year.
PLTW’s Distance Learning Support Description

PLTW Educator Forums will allow anyone in the PLTW network to submit questions, collaborate with PLTW teachers and Master Teachers, and share stories and best practices related to distance learning and the PLTW curriculum.

PLTW Educator Forums

Just-in-time, online professional learning focused on content implementation, distance learning best practices, tips, and tools. Topics will be based on the needs of the network.

PLTW Distance Learning Webinar Series

Meetings held as-needed by PLTW Directors of School Engagement (DSEs) for network members in a specific region to discuss pressing topics and issues around program implementation with Program Coordinators, Site Coordinators, teachers, and administrators. [Available to network schools only]

DSE Office Hours

Meetings held as-needed by PLTW Directors of School Engagement (DSEs) for network members in a specific region to discuss pressing topics and issues around program implementation with Program Coordinators, Site Coordinators, teachers, and administrators. [Available to network schools only]

Blog posts

Just-in-time informative posts with support, guidance, and ideas for PLTW-related instruction.

Guides to Online Learning

Eight guides providing information about PLTW’s distance learning support, as well as guidance on creating a supportive online and blended learning experience based on research-based best practices. The eight guides focus on (1) Program Coordinators, Site Coordinators, and Administrators, (2) teachers (grades PreK-5), (3) teachers (grades 6-12), (4) other educators, (5) caregivers (grades PreK-5), (6) caregivers (grades 6-12), (7) students (grades PreK-5), and (8) students (grades 6-12) and are located HERE.

Rostering Students

Rostering students is an important step for PLTW schools to complete. Students that are rostered will be able to access PLTW curriculum through Courses. PLTW is partnering with Clever to facilitate teacher and student single sign-on to make access to courses quick and easy beginning this August. If you need to roster students prior to this release, the current rostoring process using a CSV file is available. For instructions detailing how to roster students prior to the integration of Clever Single Sign On, follow the link below.

myPLTW Student Rostering Instructions

We will share more information about the new rostoring process in the coming months.

Accessing PLTW Courses

Once teachers sign into their myPLTW page, they’ll have access to Courses, where the student course and teacher guide are located. Some teachers choose to have their students sign directly into myPLTW and have that open alongside the LMS that their school uses. Other teachers embed the links from myPLTW Courses pages directly into their LMS. When students click on the embedded link, they will be prompted to sign into myPLTW to access the curriculum.

Additionally, instructions for how to simplify access to PLTW Launch is available.

Sharing PLTW Curriculum Online

PLTW’s contract language prohibits teachers and other educators from sharing our proprietary content online. Instead of sharing it openly online, consider sharing in Community.

APB Approach

PLTW is dedicated to offering students a transformative learning experience. The backbone of the PLTW experience is the APB approach, which stands for Activity-, Project-, and Problem-based learning.

The APB approach is a progression that sets students up for success in developing solutions to complex challenges. To support you and your students in school, at home, or anywhere in between,
Online and Blended Learning

Online learning for K-12 schools emerged into mainstream education in 1996. Beginning with full-time online as well as supplemental models, these programs were typically started at the state level, in universities, or via private companies. In 2019, 32 states allowed full-time online schools to operate. As of 2020, 21 states operate their own state-level supplemental virtual school, with some offering full-time options. In 2017, the fastest growing online and blended learning programs were located within districts, and post-COVID, the number of homegrown district-level online and blended learning programs is growing exponentially. Additionally, multiple districts within states started realizing the power of working together consortia-style to lower costs of hardware, software, and content.

Before COVID-19, students chose online learning for a number of reasons, some of which are listed below:

- Schedule flexibility for non-academic activities (sports, dance, music, theater)
- Mental health support
- Bullying
- Credit recovery
- Pregnancy or parenting
- Desired courses not available
- Scheduling conflicts
- Physical health
- Employment responsibilities
- Family responsibilities (e.g., caring for siblings, parent health issues)
- Individual learning preferences
- Advanced coursework
- Expanding the range of courses
- Individualized education
- Bridging gap for students performing below grade-level

Pandemics, such as COVID-19, as well as natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes, have also highlighted how online learning can provide the bridge for student learning while communities are quarantining or concentrating on recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Research has shown that online and blended learning are academically effective when planned for and implemented in intentional ways and can provide continuity of learning options for schools, educators, caregivers, and students. Research has also shown what works and doesn’t work when implementing online and blended learning. One key finding that pertains to district- and school-level recommendations is the need for support. Quality implementation of online and blended learning depends greatly on the structure in place to support all of the moving parts and stakeholders. Using this series of guides, which all include the latest research-based best practices in online and blended learning, educators can provide the support that students need to be successful in their PLTW courses and beyond wherever learning takes place.
The Online Learning Environment

Each school/district implements online and blended learning differently. This section provides you guidance related to the online and blended learning environment using research-based best practices. Secure workspaces - both physical and online - that are conducive to being a healthy productive teacher. In order to relieve stress, it is essential for you to develop and maintain organized physical and online workspaces that promote maximum efficiency and help you locate what you need more readily. Being efficient in managing your time when teaching online may be the key to balancing your work and personal life.

Create a Physical Space

- Choose space that will allow for quiet and privacy.
- Consider a door with a lock or a “do not disturb” sign if you live with others.

Create an Online Space

- Make sure you have high speed Internet service and antivirus and malware protection software to protect your system(s).
- Clear your virtual desktop. Get all those icons off the startup menu that make your system run slower.
- Scan paper documents, when possible, and place them in folders.
- Use clear file names so you can easily retrieve them later. Alphabetize file names and be consistent in your filing system.
- Get the folders for all the classes you teach set up and organized as soon as possible.
- Create bookmarks for frequently-visited websites.
- Use a calendar with deadlines and note priorities.
- Set up a solid organizational and workflow email management strategy, so you can stay engaged with students and other stakeholders on a daily basis.
- If you use the same email accounts for work and non-work, consider opening a separate account to maintain boundaries on your time.

Cultivate Health and Wellbeing

- Set up your space to be ergonomically sound.
- Make sure to take breaks to rest your eyes, wrists, and back.
- Get up and move your body and stretch periodically. Set a timer as a reminder.
- Make sure you have good light in your work space.
- Maintain an upright posture. Slumping and rounding your shoulders can lead to fatigue more quickly, especially when sitting for long periods of time.
- Drink lots of water and eat healthily.
- Get dressed for work.
- Establish healthy boundaries by using a calendar to block work and non-work time.
- Establish professional connections with fellow teachers online to ask questions, share best practices, and check in on wellbeing.

Set a Routine

- Maintain a routine.
- Establish goals for the day.
- Check and answer email and phone/text messages.
- Compose a weekly group email to the entire class. For the first week, request a response to ensure your messages are received and get students started interacting with you via email. For younger students, this might be through web conferencing or phone calls with caregivers.
- Grade student work.
- Make phone calls to caregivers, mentors, and students to build support for helping the student be successful.
- Send regular updates to caregivers.
- Track student progress.
- Help students learn time management skills through use of any pacing elements available in your learning environment.
- Make expectations clear.
- Reach out to colleagues to seek the wisdom of those who have lived and breathed online teaching before you.

Reflection Questions:

- What do I need for my physical space?
- How am I best supporting myself in my physical space in order to best serve my students and colleagues?

- What do I need for my online space?
- How am I best supporting myself in my online space in order to best serve my students and colleagues?

- How am I taking care of my health and well-being?
- How am I setting boundaries for myself to maintain my health and well-being?

- What goals am I setting each day, and are they realistic?
- How am I spending my day? Is it as efficient as it could be to maintain a healthy work/life balance?
Your Role as Online or Blended Teacher

Pre-COVID, teachers had many reasons for choosing to teach in online and blended settings, including but not limited to the following:

- Life changes (pregnancy, young children, relocation, health concern(s), family concern(s), etc.) preventing them from working outside of their home;
- Home location in an area with an unreasonable commute to a school;
- Desire to be challenged with a new modality of teaching;
- Aspirations to reach a wide demographic of students who are interested in a specialty area of learning that the teacher can provide;
- Encouragement to teach online by a school/district leader to expand their professional growth and experience or to participate in a district online program; and
- Seeking more flexible hours or supplemental income.

Because of COVID, many teachers were thrown into remote learning, which many have mistook for online learning. True online learning takes intentional planning and includes human elements of collaboration, relationships, community building, supports, teacher presence, communication, and interaction. Similarly, online teaching takes professional learning to understand and gain the additional skills and knowledge required for this work. When designed using research-based best practices, many teachers and students report that online learning offers the opportunity to develop close relationships. There are research-based best practices for online teaching and learning that are highlighted in the strategies and tips below.

Assess Students

- Offer feedback on student written work in a collaborative document during their drafting process.
- Host virtual class meetings where students engage in discussions or share presentations of their work products.
- Schedule individual or small group meetings for students to be able to talk about what they are learning.
- Determine how students will share their work with you based on platforms available to your school/district.

Build Relationships

One distinguishing feature of online learning is that all interactions must be sought out intentionally and supported. Online learning environments do not have the affordance of natural social opportunities that in-school environments do. When teaching online, teachers don’t always have the ability to read body language and see students visibly struggling. Instead, teachers need to create a trusting and meaningful relationship with their students, as well as with their caregivers. This can be accomplished through effective individual and group communication, encouraging engagement in the learning environment, productive and growth-focused feedback, and multiple opportunities for students to ask questions.

Communicate

Communicating is one of the most important (as well as most frequent) activities teachers engage in when teaching online. Communication can make or break your students’ experience.
Setting the Tone

In your online learning environment, you will want to be the first one to communicate because you are responsible for setting the tone for the type of experience students will have. The first contact is when and where that begins. You must take a number of actions to officially welcome students and caregivers to the online experience.

Welcome Letter

You should send your students and their caregivers a welcome letter containing at least the following:

- Your contact info
- Office hours
- Learning start and end dates
- Learning requirements and expectations

Keep in mind that your students and others involved in their support will see you as a real individual if you share information about yourself, including your interests and outside activities. This helps your students see you as a real person. In addition to a welcome letter, video announcements are an opportune way to personalize your learning environment.

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Continue Learning

- Become familiar with your school’s LMS and/or the online and blended learning environment to best support students, caregivers, and other educators.
- Join Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to stay informed and tackle just-in-time issues related to online and blended learning. Invite other stakeholders to join, such as teachers, other educators, caregivers, students, and administrators.
- Participate in ongoing professional learning. Because technology, pedagogy, and best practices are changing very rapidly, ongoing professional learning is critical. It is imperative for educators to participate in professional learning in order to provide the optimum learning environments for the students, teachers, other educators, caregivers, and the community that they serve.
- Share resources on best practices and guidance. When educators exhibit knowledge of and support for best practices in online and blended learning, others feel more comfortable exploring new strategies and techniques.

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Detect and Prevent Plagiarism Online

- Conduct a web search by copying and pasting several lines of the document into the search engine to find a match on the Internet. Follow your teacher radar if an assignment doesn’t feel right and raises a red flag with you.
- Check the time and date stamp of when the assignment was submitted. Most LMSs provide time and date stamps for all assignments submitted within the learning environment. If a student submits several assignments within a very short time frame, this may be an indication of inappropriate assignment sharing with another individual.
- Ask if the student is using a flash drive to save his/her work and then submits all work at the same time.
- Ask the student if the author of the document is a relative who registered the software (like Word, PowerPoint, etc.) on the computer the student uses for online classes.
- Be sure students understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite sources.
- Provide students your expectations for the assessment setting (e.g., no phones, browsers closed).
- Develop good relationships with students.
- Use discussion based assessments so that students have to share their knowledge with you through web conferencing.
- Emphasize learning and mastery over accountability and completion.
- If possible, where the course design provides a test bank of questions which can be randomly selected for each test taker or the order of the questions can be rearranged, take advantage of those options to help maintain the integrity of an assessment.

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Engage and Motivate Students

Online teachers can influence student engagement and bring back enthusiasm for learning or inspire it for the first time. To get some ideas about how to engage and motivate students, check out this slideshow from an online teacher. As teachers, we can influence motivation through the learning environment we create. We can encourage and support students and contribute to their motivation through tangible extrinsic rewards for a job well done or more personal intrinsic rewards related to students’ interest that will propel a student to push forward and succeed. In the field of brain-based research, studies show that providing a learning environment that is safe—where students feel comfortable taking risks and sharing their thoughts—promotes learning. Personalizing their learning and providing them voice and choice can help. Additionally, build in metacognitive exercises\(^3\) that allow students to reflect on past learning as well as transfer knowledge and skills.

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Reflection Questions:

- In what ways are you communicating with your students?
- How are you showing your students you are a real person through your communication?

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Reflection Questions:

- How am I preventing students from plagiarizing?
- How am I emphasizing learning and mastery over accountability and completion?

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Reflection Questions:

- How am I continuing my learning about online and blended learning?
- How am I engaging and collaborating with others to learn more?

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Ensure Access, Minimize Opportunity Gaps, and Build Equity

- Advocate for students who need accommodations and support for equitable access to technology and connectivity.
- Become familiar with and share contacts for technological support for students, caregivers, and educators.
- Support the instructional needs of English language learners (ELLs) in online and blended learning.

Ensure Accessibility

- Make sure students have what they need for accommodations to access online and blended learning.
- Support students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Section 504 Plans, and Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) to make sure their needs are met in online and blended learning environments.
- Use Universal Design for Learning in designing and developing online and blended learning.

Evaluate Continuously

- Conduct iterative evaluation of your learning environment to ensure online and blended learning efforts are serving their intended purpose for your students and their caregivers.
- Use quality standards for online and blended learning in evaluation processes. (See National Standards for Quality Online Learning and Blended Teaching Framework.)

Reflection Questions:
- How am I advocating for access to technology and Internet for students who do not have it?
- Where do I direct stakeholders who need technological support?
- How am I serving the needs of ELLs in online and blended learning?
- How am I modeling and encouraging respectful communication and engagement in online and blended learning?

Ensure Online Safety, Non-bullying, and Data Privacy

- Model and encourage the use of digital citizenship competencies. Provide guidance on developing digital citizenship - recognize the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of living, learning, and working in an interconnected digital world, and act and model in ways that are safe, legal, and ethical.
- Review FERPA, acceptable use, security, anti-bullying, plagiarism, and other school policies.

Ensure Academic Integrity and Digital Citizenship

- Develop an understanding of copyright law and fair use to support other educators and students.
- Develop strategies for preventing plagiarism in online and blended learning.
- Teach and/or guide students to perform safe and effective Internet searches and to evaluate resources.

Reflection Questions:
- What steps am I taking to develop my understanding of copyright law and fair use?
- How am I supporting my students in preventing cheating in online and blended learning?
- How am I advocating for accommodations for students in online and blended learning?
- How am I supporting students with IEPs, 504s, and ILPs in online and blended learning?
- How can I best support traditionally underserved populations in online and blended learning?

Reflection Questions:
- How am I engaging my students?
- How am I factoring in student interests, voice, and choice into my learning environment?
- How am I advocating for accommodations for students in online and blended learning?
- How am I supporting students with IEPs, 504s, and ILPs in online and blended learning?
- How can I best support traditionally underserved populations in online and blended learning?

Reflection Questions:
- How am I modeling and encouraging respectful communication and engagement in online and blended learning?
- How am I ensuring online safety and non-bullying principles?

Reflection Questions:
- How am I advocating for access to technology and Internet for students who do not have it?
- Where do I direct stakeholders who need technological support?
- How am I serving the needs of ELLs in online and blended learning?
- How am I modeling and encouraging respectful communication and engagement in online and blended learning?
- How am I ensuring online safety and non-bullying principles?

Reflection Questions:
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8 Digital Learning Collaborative - Students with Disabilities  
9 Edutopia - How to Improve Distance Learning for Students with IEPs  
10 Universal Design for Learning  
11 ISTE Digital Citizenship  
12 The National Standards for Quality Online Learning  
13 INACOL Blended Learning Teacher Competency Framework.
Facilitate Discussions Online to Create Community

Discussions happen in real time. When facilitating discussions in real time, teachers should aim to do these using small groups rather than the whole class.

- Encourage students to adhere to the same standards of behavior online as they would in school - emphasize the importance of being honest and respectful.
- Tell students to:
  - take time to think about their response before they begin speaking.
  - be brief but clear and concise.
  - be nice.
- Ask clarifying questions to encourage students to dig deeper into their understanding of a concept.

Help all Stakeholders in Supporting Students

For all stakeholders:

- Check in on wellbeing.
- Provide and maintain student support resources – academic, technological, and human (mentors, counselors, special services) -- and a team of adults who are focused on students’ success. It takes time and effort to help students stay involved and on pace to complete their learning.
- Establish and communicate clear expectations and guidelines for your role in supporting student learning.
- If not already available, create accountability agreements for caregivers and students for student success while learning online.

For caregivers:

- Establish an online learning agreement with caregivers to ensure student success.
- Communicate policy, procedures, and other information related to online learning to caregivers.
- Cultivate relationships with caregivers, knowing that parental involvement and support of online and blended learners is extremely important.
- Encourage caregivers to work with their student to use the Online Learner Readiness Rubric to understand what supports students need to be successful in online learning.
- Connect students with support services - other teachers, mentor, ed tech, librarian, tech staff, peers, others.
- Encourage students and caregivers to use the Online Learner Readiness Rubric to understand what supports students need to be successful in online learning.
- Meet with students (and their caregivers if possible) one-on-one to orient them to the learning environment and the supports they have.
- Walk students and caregivers through online and blended learning and the systems that support it.

Reflection Questions:

- What am I doing to provide information and resources for students and caregivers for tech support?
- What other stakeholders are needed to fully support each student’s learning process in online and blended learning?
• Monitor student performance and progress;
• Motivate students to more fully engage in learning activities;
• Organize and manage student learning at home; and
• Assist students as they work on assignments.

- Determine how caregivers will monitor or access their students’ course content in the LMS, if they will be provided a role with login credentials to monitor their students’ progress and assist in their work, and if there will be planned or automated progress reporting to caregivers from the student data within the LMS.
- Provide an orientation that includes both caregivers and students so they hear the same message together. Record these interactions so they can be shared with those who could not attend and archived as support materials.

- Encourage caregivers to ask for help.
- Maintain regular contact with caregivers and invite them to be involved in online and blended learning efforts and planning.
- Introduce caregivers early to your online learning options, policies, and contact people.
- Help caregivers as they learn how to monitor student progress in the LMS.
- Provide resources – print, online, and in person – for caregivers’ ongoing engagement in their students’ online experience.14

Other educators:
- Emphasize the importance of building relationships and community in online and blended learning.
- Work together with other educators to understand how best to serve them and their work with students in online and blended learning.
- Work with all stakeholders (caregivers, teachers, other educators, and school leaders) to ensure program success.
- Set up regular communication with other educators.
- Provide resources for online and blended teaching and learning.15,16,17,18
- Establish and communicate clear expectations, guidelines, boundaries, and roles with the other educators and caregivers in supporting student learning.

15 Digital Learning Collaborative - Continuity of Learning Resources https://www.digitallearningcollab.com/covid19-overview
17 K-12 Blended Teaching: A Guide to Personalized Learning and Online Integration https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended
18 Christensen Institute - Blended Learning https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blended-learning/
Grading, providing feedback, and the communication that accompanies these two tasks are probably where online teachers spend 90% of their time and energy. It's also difficult to describe grading and feedback as a discrete activity, as they incorporate so many facets of teaching: relationship building, coaching, instructing, correcting, redirecting, encouraging, communicating with various stakeholders, and more.

**Meaningful Feedback**

How can we stimulate our online learners to be actively engaged in our learning environments throughout the academic year? Beyond an enthusiastic warm welcome letter, interesting and helpful announcements, and encouraging participation in class discussions, grading and feedback can effectively result in students feeling motivated.

**Components of Meaningful Feedback**

The acronym REPL Y is a practical way to organize the key components of quality online feedback on assignments and assessments:

- **R** = Responsive
  Instructors should establish, publicize, and maintain expectations for grading and providing feedback for student assignment submissions. Timely feedback is critical because students may have forgotten what they submitted if the feedback takes too long. The idea behind timely feedback is to capture and use the students’ connection to their work while they still care about it. Capitalize on the students’ interest in the work before they move on in their learning. Timely feedback also allows the student to incorporate that feedback into future work.

- **E** = Effective
  At best, a teacher reflects back to students a realistic picture of their progress. Therefore, feedback should be very specific. Make comments that speak to the assignment’s objectives, keeping in mind the context of what the student has been learning. If you incorporate the use of rubrics, use them to assess student work. Avoid general, broad comments such as “Good job.”

- **P** = Positive
  Feedback should not be merely corrective. Always acknowledge when the student is making an effort and what the student is doing well so that they continue with those behaviors. Read (and reread) your comments to assure that a positive tone is maintained, even if the nature of your feedback may be primarily corrective.

- **L** = Learning
  Expand the learning opportunity for students. Point out a few suggestions for improving the assignment. Fill in any perceived gaps in student understanding. At the same time, don’t overwhelm the student (and yourself) by pointing out every little thing that can be improved. Make your feedback positive, helpful, and memorable by focusing on a limited number of attainable improvements for the student to consider. Provide an opportunity for growth by allowing students to learn from your feedback and try the assignment again. The goal is for students to master the content, not simply move on in their learning.

- **Y** = You (Personal)
  Personal feedback helps you build a relationship with each student. Students who feel you care about them and their success are more likely to be successful. Use greetings and closings. Using their name makes the students feel valued and communicates that you are speaking specifically to them, not using a canned response.

**Other Types of Meaningful Feedback**

**Praise and Encouragement**

Much of your instructional tasks are reactive, such as answering emails and grading assignments. However, the skilled teacher will be proactive, reaching out to students when instructor contact can be helpful and taking time to celebrate student achievement.

Consider making a quick phone call or email each week to encourage students who have done an outstanding job on their coursework, have shown sound character, or who have made solid steps to improve their progress. You could schedule a task like this into your online calendar as a recurring appointment so that you’re reminded to do it each week. Such tasks do not take long, yet they may yield great results in terms of encouraging students to continue their focus and stay on pace. This type of activity also helps to strengthen the teacher-student relationship, which in turn becomes an important element in the students’ motivation to learn.
Redirection and Clarification

While grading student work, you may find that students are missing some key knowledge or skills needed to succeed in a lesson. Perhaps they are missing essential prior knowledge, there is an academic integrity issue, or they seem to have some real difficulties in navigating the online course. In situations like these, mere feedback isn’t enough. Don’t let a situation like this continue for long. Pick up the phone or open your email and contact the caregiver and student. When you take the initiative to contact them to address the issue early, it’s much more likely that the student will have a successful and enjoyable experience in your online learning environment.

Our Work Together

The PLTW-specific guidance and research-based best practices for online and blended learning shared in this guide provide teachers (grades PreK-5) a comprehensive perspective from which to implement and review online and blended learning practices and take steps to improve student learning and caregiver support. Working alongside caregivers, students, other educators, and administrators, teachers can increase the efficacy of their online and blended learning efforts to improve student lives through meaningful and intentional learning experiences.