

3 Keys to Successful Virtual Learning for K–5



Stride Learning Solutions, a leader in the digital learning space for more than 20 years, has been ready and able to provide effective learning experiences to K–5 students throughout the pandemic. Our innovative solutions were there for students, families, and educators in March 2020 when schools throughout the nation shuttered and educators scrambled to put emergency remote learning measures in place for 55 million students.¹ As the pandemic wore on through the 2020–21 school year, we continued to deliver high-quality, engaging, and accessible learning environments that met the specific needs of our youngest learners in remote, hybrid, and in-person settings.

As we enter the 2021–22 school year, our hopes for a return to normal are tempered by a summer surge in COVID-19 due to the highly-transmissible Delta variant and the reality that children under the age of 12 are not yet eligible for vaccination. Safety concerns remain paramount as families and educators make tough choices about the best way to support the academic growth while maintaining the mental and physical health and well-being of our children.

As we weigh options for the school year, what's become clear is that one-size-fits-all education is not a reality — because, as we know, one size never did fit all. The traditional model of education with all students learning synchronously in a brick-and-mortar schoolhouse now seems antiquated, rigid, and unappealing to

many parents who want a more personalized education for their children.² Despite widespread challenges with virtual learning environments throughout the pandemic, pockets of K–5 students flourished in fully remote or hybrid settings that utilized well-designed, high-quality, developmentally-appropriate digital resources.^{3 4 5}

An opportunity exists for us to re-imagine learning entirely — especially for our K–5 learners and educators. We know from brain research that our youngest learners need a greater level of scaffolded support to help them access and engage in the learning process⁶ and to contextualize, process, and apply new knowledge and skills.⁷ This level of support is only possible in a learning environment that is intentionally designed for this age

1 Garcia, Emma & Weiss, Elaine. (September 10, 2020). COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S. education policy: Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from [URL](#).

2 K12 in partnership with 3rd party researcher, Qualtrics (March 2021). Stride – K-12 parent survey relaunch topline report. Retrieved from [URL](#).

3 Evans, J. (2020). Digital learning during the pandemic: Emerging evidence of an education transformation. Speak Up Research Project 2019-20 National Findings and Insights. Project Tomorrow. Retrieved from [URL](#).

4 Kingsbury, Ian (September 30, 2020). Online learning: How do brick and mortar schools stack up to virtual schools? Retrieved [URL](#).

5 Stride (May 6, 2021). Stride, Inc. bucks national trend and provides improved student outcomes during COVID-19: New study refutes claims of learning loss in online programs. Retrieved from [URL](#).

6 CAST. (2018). About universal design for learning. Retrieved from [URL](#).

7 Schwartz, N.H. Kirschner, P. A., & Hendrick, C. (2020). How learning happens: Seminal works in educational psychology and what they mean in practice. Routledge. ISBN 9780367184575. TechTrends 65, 120–121 (2021).

group. Elementary school can be a flexible, customizable learning ecosystem where teachers and students have agency and personalized learning happens organically in an engaged, inspired, and connected community of learners.

Stride Learning Solutions has more than two decades of experience doing just that — creating flexible and accessible digital learning environments that can be customized to meet the specific needs of learners. Steeped in research and tested in classrooms and virtual environments across the country, we offer 3 keys to successful virtual learning for K–5.

#1 Virtual by Design

Intentionally designed virtual learning is not the same as the emergency remote learning that led to widespread frustration and negative associations with online learning throughout the pandemic. Rather, the learning environment is designed to support developmentally appropriate practice, defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children as “...methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning.” Such environments are based on the science of how students learn and fueled by innovative technology to make learning interactive and engaging.⁸ A K–5 curriculum for virtual learning should include core courses that focus on developing fundamental skills and teaching the key knowledge-building blocks or schemas that each student needs to master the major subject areas, meet state standards, and complete more advanced coursework. The curriculum should be accompanied by formative assessment to provide ongoing feedback about learning progress and opportunities to remediate or accelerate learning.^{9 10}

A well-designed K–5 virtual learning environment reflects the work of a team of professionals. Each course is crafted

by curriculum experts to ensure that the content and pedagogy are tailored to the age and skills of the students and cover the relevant learning standards. Instructional designers build activities in collaboration with visual designers, information specialists, and media specialists

to choose the best way to present concepts and information. Writers and editors make sure the content is accurate, engaging, and appropriate. Assessment specialists ensure the assessment items are free of bias and written to the correct level of difficulty against a standards target. User experience designers conduct user-testing to inform development and ensure that new content follows mobile-first development practices and responsive design. Software developers design and build the systems that make the curriculum and the online school platform run efficiently and effectively. Lastly, quality assurance specialists make sure everything works properly.

#2 Built for Diverse Learners

Any teacher or parent knows that students have diverse experiences, styles, and needs, reflective of a variety of factors including their unique lived experiences, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, home language, gender, special needs, abilities, personal dispositions, and prior knowledge. It is essential, too, that K–5 learners have age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate content, technology, and instruction to effectively access and process new information.

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We know that evidence-based educational experiences designed on the principles of the Universal Design for Learning framework optimize learning by making it more accessible to diverse students, regardless of their unique needs. The framework is built upon the premise that students should have equitable access to learning by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.¹¹ In other words, students should be given multiple avenues to engage and connect with the lesson; content should be represented in a variety of ways; and students should be able to demonstrate what they’ve learned through various methods. Resources are designed in such a way that all students can access learning, digest content, and demonstrate what they have learned through means and modalities that are right for them.

#3 Bolstered by a Continuum of Supports

Well-designed K–5 virtual learning environments include a continuum of supports to help students learn and gain independence as learners. Through instructional scaffolding techniques, educators provide varying levels of support and assistance to help students make sense of new information. As

8 Wang, C.X. CAFE: An Instructional Design Model to Assist K-12 Teachers to Teach Remotely during and beyond the Covid-19 Pandemic. TechTrends 65, 8–16 (2021). Retrieved from [URL](#).

9 Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam (1998) Assessment and Classroom Learning, Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 5:1, 7-74, Retrieved from [URL](#).

10 Ryerse, Mary & Brookhart, Susan (July 9, 2018). The Research Base for Formative Assessment.” Getting Smart. Retrieved from [URL](#).

11 CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from [URL](#).

students become more adept at learning independently, educators gradually remove scaffolds. Our youngest learners need these supports to continually engage in the learning process, assimilate knowledge, and consistently learn at the appropriate level of challenge.

In a virtual environment, students are supported not only by the teacher, but also by digital resources designed to bolster support. With the newly designed K–5 curriculum from Stride, students have access to content that’s intentionally designed to support greater student independence, taking much of the responsibility off teachers. Additionally,

audio, visual, and interactive supports guide students into gradually more self-directed independent learning tasks that can be completed asynchronously.

In some cases, young learners also have a Learning Coach to guide and support them throughout the day. A Learning Coach can be a parent, family member, trusted friend, or any other caring adult who facilitates the learning experience. Learning coaches support young learners as needed in offline activities, making sure students attend required sessions, and providing general guidance. Stride’s newly redesigned virtual experience removes much of the burden for Learning Coaches to keep students

motivated and understand how to navigate their online experience. New courses even include essential holistic experiences like brain breaks to support social-emotional learning and development.

Well-designed K–5 virtual learning environments are built with this continuum of support at the forefront of the design process and can be implemented successfully in diverse learning situations. The customized support from the teacher and embedded digital resources to aid in supporting the learning process enable students to thrive with varying degrees of support from the Learning Coach.

Virtual K–5 Learning with Stride Learning Solutions

At Stride, we offer student-centric courses with rich content that engage and motivate young learners, whether on their own or with the support of their teachers and Learning Coaches. Our K–5 curriculum was designed thoughtfully over time and is being refreshed for the 2021–22 school to be a seamless education experience with highly engaging learning opportunities that facilitate deep content mastery. Our enhanced visual design and seamless integrations make it easy for teachers and students to navigate and focus on what matters. Adaptive technologies support independent student learning at the appropriate level of challenge.

The new comprehensive and cohesive K–5 curriculum includes fully revamped Math, ELA, Social Studies, Science, Art, and PE/Health courses. Designed to support the needs of diverse learners, the program can be implemented fully digitally or taught with a la

carte materials in virtual, hybrid, or in-person environments with or without teacher-led live instruction.

In fully virtual environments that have varying degrees of support from Learning Coaches, learning is supported by tools in the online school and K12 app, lesson guides, videos, opportunities to connect with others, and specially designed programming.

As we re-imagine what learning can and should be for our youngest learners, families now have agency in selecting the K–5 experience in which they know their children will learn best. Well-designed virtual learning provides the flexibility that families desire, customized learning experiences, and supports for students and adults at home so that students can truly thrive in this next generation of teaching and learning.



Contact us today to request a demo of our K–5 offerings.

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