August 2020

University School of Nashville
USN Middle School
Operating Instructions for Learning Remotely

Adapted from the Princeton Montessori Remote Learning Handbook, which was created in collaboration with the Montessori School of Tokyo.
COVID-19 News and Resources

Need tech support while distance learning?
Kari Luecke, MS Educational Technologist can help.
kluecke@usn.org or select a time here

Need support for learning success?
Anna Claire McKay, MS Learning Coordinator can help.
amckay@usn.org Pick a time to connect.: calendly.com/msmckay/15min

Need support with a social or emotional issue?
Need support finding resources in your community?
Helen Tarleton, MS Director of Counseling and Resources can help.
htarleton@usn.org Pick a time: calendly.com/htarleton

Need support with the schedule, electives, or PE enrollment?
Need support with problem-solving?
Kelicia Cox, Assistant Head of Middle School can help.
kcox@usn.org

Need help accessing books or other library resources?
Kate Pritchard, MS/HS Librarian, can help.
kpritchard@usn.org Pick a time: calendly.com/kpritch

Need support solving a USN or grade-level challenge?
Jeff Greenfield, Head of Middle School can help.
jgreenfield@usn.org

Need support getting your needs met by our community?
Need to express a concern about our community?
Roderick White, Director of Office of Diversity and Community Life can help.
rwhite@usn.org
Students:
Your job is to stay engaged, turn your work in, and communicate regularly with your teachers so that you and your teacher have a PROCESS by which to do the work together remotely.

DO YOUR WORK. TURN IT IN. STAY IN TOUCH.

Parents:
Your job is threefold:
1. to help your child establish and maintain a healthy routine for sleep and exercise,
2. to assist your child in organizing the school day, and
3. to check in on work completion and his or her ongoing communication with teachers.

Please see “The Prepared Environment” below.

ASSIST WITH ROUTINE, ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNICATION.

Faculty and Administration:
Our jobs are to develop habits of ongoing communication during remote learning, to provide structure and support, and to provide the necessary materials and feedback for students to continue learning during remote periods.

PROVIDE STRUCTURE AND SUPPORT; TEACH AND GIVE FEEDBACK.

If each of us fulfills our part of this agreement, the transitions between at-school and remote learning will be less disruptive, and students will have a more integrative experience throughout the year.
# University School of Nashville

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“Our primary goal in Middle School is to provide a challenging and encouraging environment that is at all times sensitive to the unique developmental needs of preadolescents and supportive of a positive self-concept for each child. We aim to help children move along the continuum toward greater independence, giving them responsibility for their own work and behavior while affording them increasing opportunities to make appropriate, independent decisions as they show their readiness to do so. (Read the complete statement here.)

Jeff Greenfield, Head of Middle School

During periods of learning from home, our aim is to create a framework that serves our students and supports parents as we all adapt to a different daily routine. It is important to us that the student’s activity during this time be thoughtful, challenging and rewarding — and more often than not, enjoyable.

Replicating exactly what happens in our classrooms is not something we can achieve at home as a USN education involves trained teachers delivering an approach to learning in classrooms with their students. Therefore, our goals are to work in collaboration with families to keep alive the culture of learning that each teacher develops in person and to provide families with support and activities that match the developmental needs and characteristics of the child using what is available at home.

**How do we establish this at home?**

Before you read further, it may be helpful to review these important resources which guide our programming decisions in Middle School:

- Core Beliefs of USN’s Middle School
- Use of Phones and Other Devices
- Active Learning Guide
- Parent & Student Remote Learning Resources
Students, whether during remote learning or in-school learning, we hope for you to experience connection in two important ways:

1. We want you to feel connected to your learning, to do more than “complete assignments.”
2. We want to stay connected with you as a learner and person, and will strive to do that in a variety of ways.

The guidelines throughout this Handbook will outline how USN’s Middle School teachers and administration will support all Middle School families throughout periods of learning remotely.

**Preparing the Environment**

For Middle School students, learning begins with finding ways to support independence, engaging in meaningful tasks, and supplementing learning through various activities suggested by teachers. In addition, we cannot emphasize enough how critical it is that families work collaboratively with each other to establish a quiet space, expectations, and routines for any specific assignments shared by teachers:

1. Discuss where you would like to set up your learning space (anywhere but on the bed and preferably not in the bedroom, when possible). Agree on a place to pick up your device in the morning and return later in the day when school work is completed. This should absolutely NOT be in a student’s bedroom. When a device is on and logged in, it reaches out to the school server every 10-15 minutes. This allows our tech department information about when the device is being used during unusual hours.

2. Make a schedule together that works for your family and is based on the Middle School Remote Learning Schedule.

3. The expectation in the family should be that you wake early, get dressed as if going to school and commit to at least four hours of school each day.

4. Organize your materials, so they are easy to access. In particular, together walk through the online platforms needed for classes, assignments, getting help, and feedback.

5. Discuss resources that are available to you when parents are working, as well as a system for continuing to work with unanswered questions until they can be answered.

It will be important for you to maintain your routine of handing in work and receiving feedback from your teachers. As this is NECESSARY in order for remote learning to progress, discuss a plan for how you will communicate when things are completed other than students just telling parents the work is “done.”

We are here to support you through this process. If the first conversation about your expectations would best be facilitated by someone outside of your family, please contact our Administrative Team for support (see contact information inside the front cover of this manual).
Practical Life

Practical life is an important foundation for remote learning and relevant to all age levels. These are not only life skills that should be mastered to be successful adults, but by doing them every day, you are exercising important memory networks that allow you to feel capable of managing your own lives. They include practicing self-care, planning, and problem-solving.

**Practical life activities:**
- foster order and sequence
- develop concentration
- foster independence
- provide opportunities for planning and carrying out tasks

Practical Life experiences also provide you with opportunities to contribute to family life.

Inherent in these activities is the development of key executive functions: decision making, organization, problem-solving, impulse control, collaboration and communication. **These skills form the foundation of your academic learning.**

Planning and gathering resources to complete tasks is purposeful work. These activities foster a sense of contribution, responsibility, shared experiences and satisfaction.

**Examples of practical life might include:**
- setting the table
- watering plants
- tidying and organizing rooms
- planning an outing
- taking care of pets
- preparing a snack/meal
- helping with shopping lists/budgeting
- repairing a bicycle
- planting a small garden

As you get older, these activities lead naturally to volunteer experiences and the beginnings of community work. In High School, many of these practical life experiences will be the foundation of your sense of belonging and personal vision.
The Uninterrupted Work Cycle

Establishing a routine that works for your family is an essential first step to creating a successful learning environment at home. Students, you are very familiar with this framework from school. In a classroom, you are given blocks of time in order to explore your work deeply. This contributes directly to the development of concentration and provides opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve. This is also the framework that fosters child-centered as opposed to teacher-directed learning.

In this day and age of distractibility and addiction to devices, it is more important than ever to teach children how to focus intently and peacefully for appropriate periods of time.

A challenging difference for students between in-class learning and remote learning is losing the “herd” mentality of the school day. The inherent skills and outcomes that result from being in a rich and interesting classroom, coupled with dynamic teacher and peer interactions in class provide a container for your ability to concentrate, collaborate, and problem-solve. Working at home independently can be challenging because you have to rely on intrinsic motivation to concentrate. If you struggle in this way, please reach out to our Middle School Learning Coordinator for ideas about how to help.

Ownership of Tasks and Sharing of Learning

An ongoing effort onsite at USN is our work to instill in you an internal sense that you own the learning process. As with the routine, you are familiar with the need for taking this on during the school day, and in order for learning remotely to work, you must do so at home, too. Here are a few key points that aid in cultivating your self-direction and attention to your work:

- Choice
- Participation in planning and organizing tasks (printing and posting what you can)
- Conversation
- Actively using your resources: in particular, knowing learning platforms, checking email regularly, and accessing weekly newsletters for updates
- Sharing of knowledge

You will be receiving regular communications from your classroom teachers in the coming weeks. We encourage parents to follow the teachers’ suggestions and guidance when students are completing work at home. The more you as a student are involved in developing and detailing your activities, the more you can achieve.

One note regarding sharing or presenting work: Planning a presentation or sharing time at the end of a project gives you an opportunity to use your voice and, as you know, it is a regular occur-
rence in our Middle School classrooms. It is an essential part of the learning process as it requires synthesis of learning to describe, explain and express yourself clearly. This is something you can replicate at home, as teachers will be doing through their Zoom class meetings. Certainly periods of remote learning also require parents to adjust to extraordinary circumstances, and finding time for end-of-day presentations may be challenging. In these cases, consider enlisting a grandparent or aunt or uncle on a Zoom call, or ask a sibling if you can teach them about what you just learned.

**Feeling of Responsibility and Contribution to the Community/Family**

Going to University School of Nashville is often described by students as being part of a big family. All of the aspects of our school life detailed above result in a feeling of belonging to a community and with that, you are learning to be responsible to yourself, to others, and to the environment.

If the larger school community is the extended family, your advisory and classes are like nuclear family units. We want you to feel a sense of belonging there, and we want you to understand that is accomplished by both receiving support from others and by giving support and encouragement to the group. In classrooms, we base our behavioral expectations on this equation, and they also apply in remote learning. We ALL have a responsibility to create a sense of caring and community online.
**ZOOM – Student Online Classroom Etiquette**

This is a virtual classroom, therefore, appropriate classroom behavior is expected.

Please take care of your personal needs (school-appropriate dress, basic hygiene, eating, chewing gum, talking to others in your home) prior to entering a Zoom classroom.

As a rule, do not Zoom on your bed. If that is the ONLY place it works in your family to be, please have your parents email your teacher.

- Log into your class or meeting from a distraction-free, quiet environment.
- Be sure that you are using your own name that is recognizable to your teachers.
- Your face should be fully visible. Adjust the camera so your teacher and classmates can see your face from top of head to neck.
- Unless otherwise directed, please keep your audio on mute until you want to speak. This will help to limit background noise.
- Consider using a headset with an external mic for best hearing and speaking capabilities.
- Close unneeded applications on your computer to optimize the video quality.
- If you would like to speak or answer a question, either raise your hand in your video to get your teacher’s attention, or use the “Raise Hand” feature. Unmute yourself after you are called on by your teacher. When you are speaking, let others know that you are finished by saying something like, “That’s all,” or “I’m done,” or “Thank you,” so that everyone knows you have finished your comments.
- If chat is available and you would like to use it, remember that it is public, and a record of the chat is kept and archived. A transcript is available to the host (teacher) at the end of the session.
- Keep paper and a pen or pencil handy to take notes.
- Make sure your video is on (if you have camera capabilities) so your teacher and peers can see you. If viewing yourself in the video is difficult for you, you have the option to choose “hide myself.” Ask your teacher if you want to learn more about that.
- Be mindful of your background lighting. If you are sitting with your back to a window, you may be silhouetted by the light coming through. Your overhead light might also need to be adjusted for the best image quality.
- As is the case in any school setting, please do not use profanity or inappropriate language.
- Remember to sign out or “leave the meeting” when the session is finished.
A visual reminder regarding digital nutrition and device use:

How’s my digital nutrition?

- Are my choices kind?
- What’s the objective for using this device?
- Do my actions reflect the school’s values?
- Have I rebooted/Refreshed/Reset recently?
- Are my abs task-related?
How to Email Your Teachers

1. Use email for communication that cannot be addressed in a zoom meeting.
2. Be formal.
   - Always use a greeting: “Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. Last Name”
   - Spell your teacher’s name correctly.
   - Use spell check, write in complete sentences, and use capital letters and appropriate language for addressing an adult.
   - Do not use text language or shortcuts.
   - Use “please” and “thank you.”
3. Use your USN email account.
4. Include a meaningful subject line. (For example, English Essay Draft)
5. Briefly state the reason why you are emailing.
   - List specific assignment title.
   - Explain what the problem is.
   - Ask for clarification first before assuming an error has been made.
6. If you are emailing with a problem, suggest a solution.
7. Sign it with your full name, first and last.
8. Reread and proofread what you have written before you hit “Send.”
   - Spell check.
   - Be polite, concise, and clear.
9. Allow adequate time for a reply.
   - 24-hour window for replies.
   - Be sure to check your email for a response.

Sample student email template to use when inquiring about a grade:

Dear Mr./Ms./ XYZ,
My name is ABC and I’m in your #th period class. I have a question about a score/incorrect score/low score/missing score for assignment/test/quiz “LMNOP (name of specific assignment)” on DATE. I’m wondering why….

Can we please discuss this? Or, if possible, could you please look into it and email me any information?
Thank you for your time,

Student First Name and Last Name
Expectations for Participation in Morning Advisory:

1. Advisory is the first class of the school day and you should be ready for it in the same way you would be if you were walking into the building. Wake up early enough to get dressed, have breakfast, contribute to your family life with a chore or two, gather the things you need for school, and set yourself up in your home learning environment.

2. SHOW UP ON TIME! Start the zoom call two minutes before class starts to be sure you are there from the beginning.

3. Follow all of the zoom etiquette guidelines mentioned above as you would for any class.

4. Help your advisor in his or her efforts to use advisory as a time for community building. Participate in the meeting with curiosity and kindness, appreciating what your classmates contribute.
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Program-Specific Information

Expectations for Grades 5-6
Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work as independently as possible.
- Follow teachers’ guidelines and expectations.
- Try being your own advocate when assistance or further clarification is required, or ask a parent to help you do so.
- Communicate directly with teachers via email. Do not expect a reply after 5 p.m.
- Follow the schedule you have co-created with your parents.
- Work for approximately 4 hours a day.
- Submit or review assigned work according to guidelines.

In general, we expect you to take responsibility for completing your work within the timelines provided. When that isn’t possible because of circumstances in your family life, we expect you to inform your advisor and/or the teacher whose work you were unable to complete.

Parents are invited to:

- Ensure that your child has a healthy routine around sleep (9-12 hours), exercise, and digital exposure.
- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home.
- Establish a routine and work schedule including how to turn in work for each teacher.
- Work with your child to agree on morning practical life activities and family responsibilities that will set him or her up for entering the school day fully awake and with a sense of competency and purpose.
- Check in with your child each morning about plans for school work time and workspace.
- While we don’t expect parents to completely review assignments, we ask that you maintain daily conversations about work progress and set expectations that work will be done on time.
- Provide regular opportunities at home for your child to present or teach what they have recently learned (does not have to be to you).
- Help your early adolescent process his/her understanding of and concerns about the pandemic.
Find a way to keep tabs on your child’s online social life. Participate actively in ensuring that online connections beyond the school-sanctioned ones are appropriate in length and content. While we fully appreciate the need for socialization, we also know that there is a developmental gap between the capacity of a teen’s brain to respond kindly during stressful interactions and the number of ambiguous and stressful interactions online.

Teachers will:
- Inquire about specific family circumstances in the lives of their advisees and communicate them to the teaching team.
- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward.
- Communicate in a consistent way with parents, answering student or parent emails within 24 hours.
- Provide weekly work plans.
- Greet and support each advisee during the morning Advisory meeting.
- Hold weekly class meetings and maintain one-on-one connections with students.
- Review assignments and provide feedback.
- Support the need for group work, working virtually with a friend when possible.

Middle School Administration will:
- Be intentional about providing support for specific family circumstances in the lives of Middle School students and the teaching team.
- Collaborate with MS elective and PE staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music and PE.
- Encourage socialization. Middle School students are extremely social; they need to feel connected to their friends frequently.
- Provide teachers with adequate support to meet the needs of students for relationships and for feedback.
- Offer resources for additional learning opportunities in the greater community.
- Offer weekly zoom meetings with updates to parents.
- Act as liaisons to grade-level teaching teams.
- Provide support for students/families who are struggling with remote learning.
Expectations for Grades 7-8

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work as independently as possible.
- Follow teachers’ guidelines and expectations.
- Be your own advocate when assistance or further clarification is required, or ask for help from someone at home in doing so.
- Communicate directly with teachers via email. Do not expect a reply after 5 p.m.
- Follow the schedule you have co-created with your parents.
- Work for approximately 4 hours a day.
- Complete and submit assigned work according to guidelines for all classes including electives and PE.

In general, we expect you to take responsibility for completing your work within the timelines provided. When that isn’t possible because of circumstances in your family life, we expect you to let your advisor or the relevant teacher know.

Parents are invited to:

- Ensure that your child has a healthy routine around sleep (8-10 hours), exercise, and digital exposure.
- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home.
- Establish a routine and work schedule including how to turn in work for each teacher.
- Work with your child to agree on morning practical life activities and family responsibilities that will set him or her up for entering the school day fully awake and with a sense of competency and purpose.
- Check in with your child each morning about plans for school work time and workspace.
- Follow along with the teachers’ suggested activities to gain a general awareness of your child’s assignments.
- Check in with your child each morning about plans for school work time and workspace.
- While we don’t expect parents to completely review assignments, we ask that you maintain daily conversations about work progress and set expectations that work will be done on time.
- Provide opportunities at home for your child to present or teach what they have learned that day (does not have to be to you).
- Help your early adolescent process his/her understanding of and concerns about the pandemic.
- Be sure online connections beyond the school-sanctioned ones are appropriate in length and content. Adolescents crave and require social interaction.
Teachers will:
- Inquire about specific family circumstances in the lives of their advisees and communicate them to the teaching team.
- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward.
- Communicate in a consistent way with parents, answering student or parent emails within 24 hours.
- Provide weekly work plans.
- Greet and support each advisee during the morning Advisory meeting.
- Hold weekly class meetings and maintain one-on-one connections with students.
- Review assignments and provide feedback.
- Support the need for group work, working virtually with a friend when possible.

Middle School Administration will:
- Be intentional about providing support for specific family circumstances in the lives of Middle School students and the teaching team.
- Collaborate with MS elective and PE staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music and PE.
- Encourage socialization. Middle School students are extremely social; they need to feel connected to their friends frequently.
- Provide teachers with adequate support to meet the needs of students for relationships and for feedback.
- Offer resources for additional learning opportunities in the greater community.
- Offer weekly zoom meetings with updates to parents.
- Act as liaisons to grade-level teaching teams.
- Provide support for students who struggle with remote learning and their parents.

Enrichment, Electives, and PE
Enrichment activities are a part of our remote learning program. These areas offer students many opportunities for self-expression, language and an outlet during stressful times. Students are required to attend and participate in these important activities just as they do when they are at USN. Please contact Jeff Greenfield and the enrichment instructor if a student cannot attend regularly.

During this period, all of our faculty will be communicating with each program team to share their plans for activities related to Art, Music, Spanish, Physical Education, and After School. Typically, these activities are listed in the assignment channel on usn.org.

Please refer to this preliminary list of activities compiled by our electives teachers.

USN MS Creative Corner
University School of Nashville

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I reach my child’s teacher?
Email remains the best way to contact a teacher. If you wish to speak to a teacher, please use email to set up a time for a phone call.

When can I expect a response?
In most cases, you can expect a response to emails within 24 hours.

How much communication about COVID-19 can I expect from the school?
School leadership will communicate with you directly should there be any updates on the COVID-19 situation that might have a direct impact on school operations. The frequency of communication from your child’s teacher will vary depending on each program. Our MS will continue to communicate updates to our community through email. The USN website will also publish new information regarding our facility and grounds closures as it is received.

Can teachers tutor students individually online?
In most cases, no. Teachers will be connecting with families on a ‘class level’, and also sharing suggestions, feedback, and expectations on an individualized or small group level where necessary. Teachers also provide extensive personal feedback on individual assignments. Each grade level schedule will designate regular “Open Zoom” times for any student to reach out to any teacher for extra support.

How much technology will be used?
In the MS, a combination of the USN website and G-Suite apps (including Google Classroom and google docs) will be the primary instructional platforms, but individual teachers may use additional apps pertaining to their subject areas. These apps include but are not limited to: SeeSaw, Khan Academy, GooseChase, Flipgrid.

MS Educational Technologist, Kari Luecke, has compiled a list of support for technology here.

What support will be provided to children whose parents both work full-time?
USN is unable to provide child care for all working families. We understand that sudden school closure is an inconvenience for everyone. If any USN family finds themselves in an emergency situation or in truly exceptional circumstances, please contact us. We may be able to help or connect you with other families who would be willing to do so.