



Guidance for Families Regarding Learning Pods

A number of Atlanta Public Schools families have felt the need to create home-based learning communities in conjunction with neighbors and classmates, often referred to as “learning pods.” APS understands the desire to recreate some of the collaborative and social aspects of the traditional school setting. We are also sympathetic to working parents who are balancing their career responsibilities with the need to assist their children with online learning. However, family learning pods must be completely independent of district staff, resources or facilities.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Are APS teachers allowed to enter into agreements with families to tutor students for pay?** No. APS Policy GAG, Staff Conflict of Interest, strictly prohibits teachers from tutoring APS students for pay during the school year. This is a long-standing policy of the Atlanta Board of Education.

Private arrangements between staff and families present a clear conflict of interest and exacerbate inequities across the district. District staff have been explicitly instructed that there will be employment consequences for engaging in these arrangements.

2. **Will principals and staff ensure that students who are together in a learning pod are assigned to the same classrooms, specials, etc.?** No. Class assignment and scheduling decisions are made independent of the preference or convenience of family learning pods. Many of these class assignments are determined by teachers and school staff based on student need. Providing district support to family-created learning pods is a violation of APS Policy BBBB, Equity, which was adopted by our Board last year. APS will not conduct any of its instruction, practices or procedures as a means for facilitating family learning pods.
3. **Should teachers and principals provide lesson plans in advance to learning pod facilitators?** No, providing lesson plans in advance to learning pod facilitators or parents would violate the district’s Equity policy. All APS students should be provided access to APS instruction simultaneously, from their APS teacher in the virtual classroom.
4. **Will APS teachers give pod facilitators their own access to the teacher’s Google or Zoom classroom?** No. APS staff should have very limited direct contact with pod facilitators. Even in a virtual model, our classrooms should remain free of involvement or participation of any adults who are not the APS teacher or staff. The pod facilitator is not a part of the APS virtual classroom. FERPA, federal law intended to protect student

privacy, remains applicable in our virtual learning context.

5. **Should Zoom links and student passwords be shared directly from APS teachers to pod facilitators?** No. APS staff have no relationship with pod facilitators and should limit communication with them. Parents are free to provide log-in information to pod facilitators for the purpose of getting their own children into their remote classrooms.
6. **Is it appropriate for parents and pod facilitators to sit with their children and watch classes while they are conducted virtually?** As a practical matter, it is reasonable to expect that some parents and pod facilitators will feel the need to sit with their children and assist them in participating in virtual classes, especially with respect to our youngest students. However, we respectfully request that parents and pod facilitators try to limit their direct observations of classes to the extent possible. At all times, any adult observing a classroom should be sensitive to the right of privacy of all our students.

Any adult watching an online class should not interrupt the lesson for any reason. Teachers will make recordings of lessons available to students and parents.

7. **Would it be appropriate for pod facilitators to be provided information about students who are not in their pod?** No. APS must continue to protect the privacy of our students, especially in the virtual instruction model.
8. **Should APS teachers plan with or communicate directly with pod facilitators?** No. There should be no working relationship between APS staff members and pod facilitators.
9. **How should we handle the possibility of pod facilitators observing the special education accommodations or resource groups of students?** APS staff should implement measures to protect the privacy of students in receipt of special education accommodations, for example, allowing students to turn off their cameras during an online session.
10. **Is it okay for pod facilitators to stream the teacher's lesson to the entire pod?** As a practical matter, it is reasonable to expect that a pod facilitator may stream or display the lesson to all pod participants from a single device. This poses no particular policy or equity concern for APS. However, APS cannot provide any resource to help the pod facilitator accomplish this task.
11. **Are students allowed to complete their work without being present, online, during the scheduled school day?** Students are being held accountable for attendance, so should be logged in to their classes every day during the scheduled time.
12. **How should staff respond if parents make their pod facilitator an emergency contact in Infinite Campus?** Parents and families have complete autonomy over who they name

as emergency contacts. If a pod facilitator is placed in this role, staff should communicate with them accordingly.

- 13. What do we know now about our return to face-to-face instruction?** At the Board of Education meeting on Monday, September 8th, we provided the first of our monthly public health checkpoints. The previously stated plan for virtual instruction through the first nine weeks of school (Friday, October 23rd) remains in place. While we are continuously monitoring the health status of Atlanta, Fulton and DeKalb (and are encouraged by the positive trends we are seeing in some of the health metrics), we do not plan to bring any students back for face-to-face instruction before Monday, October 26th at the earliest.

We are, however, working at this time to identify the groups of students who would be our priority for in-person instruction once we have emerged from substantial spread. Given the challenges faced by our early learners and special needs students in the virtual environment, it is likely that these populations would be our Tier I focus for coming back into our schools.

- 14. What guidance can we offer to families withdrawing their students from APS for the purpose of homeschooling?** The Georgia Department of Education regulates homeschooling in our state. At a minimum, students are not officially enrolled as a homeschool student unless they are registered with GaDOE for this purpose and the family submits a Declaration of Intent form. The State has requirements for home study, including content and student assessment, which must be met by families. More information can be found on GaDOE's website: <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Pages/Home-Schools.aspx>