

COMMUNICATION:

Tips to Maximize Working from Home

Since its founding, Allovue has used online messaging as its primary communication tool to connect dozens of remote employees across timezones. During this unprecedented time in public education, educators and district leaders need solutions to communicate with their teams while keeping themselves, and their communities safe.

Here, we've documented some guidelines to help your district get started. Our tool of choice is Slack and the best practices below focus on this platform. However, many of these concepts can set your district up for success using whichever communications tool is supporting your remote operations.

TIPS TO GET STARTED



Set Your Availability:

Asynchronous communication allows for team flexibility across time and space. The downside of this is that it can sometimes feel like the "district" is open 24/7. District staff should make themselves available for communication and questions during hours that make sense for your district.

In the case that there is a major problem requiring immediate attention, district leaders and administrators should opt to call their team members.



Note Your Status and Presence:

By setting your availability and presence, you are communicating to your team how likely you are to respond to them at a given time. It also helps members of the team decide whether and when they should message you directly. Statuses are a great way to signal if you're actively working, out sick or using paid time off, in a meeting, or if you're available for conversation.

Here are some tips for setting your status and presence using Slack:

The easiest way to set your status is to type **`/status`** in any channel. If you install the Google Calendar App, it will automatically update your status to reflect when you are in a meeting.

To indicate that you are presently away, type **`/away`** in any channel. The circle next to your name will toggle from filled in green ("I am present and available") to an open circle ("I am not present on Slack or available"). Presence is normally determined by whether or not you have Slack open and active. However, if you type `/away`, you can remain away for a period of time or indefinitely until you return using `/away` again.

FEATURES FOR DISTRICTS:

Here are a few of the top features of a communications tool that can benefit school districts. This functionality is available in Slack and we recommend taking advantage of features like these in whichever tool you choose.

Email: Greatly reduce email clutter and make it easy for your team to focus on what's most important without sifting through junk mail.

Polls: Easily distribute a poll to large or small groups of a team with easy-to-install add-ons. Perhaps you only want a single department to respond to a poll instead of the whole staff. Simply create a poll and include it in the proper channel.

Sharing Documents: With integrations to Google Docs, Dropbox, and other cloud-sharing platforms, sharing and collaborating on documents remotely is a breeze.

Collaboration: During a crisis, it can be difficult for a department to meet and collaborate. Create channels or communication streams for specific departments where members can ask questions, share lessons, and discuss next steps.

Video Conferencing: With easy Zoom integration, easily launch video meetings and webinars to keep your team connected.



Use Notifications Wisely:

Use Do Not Disturb (DND) functionality to turn off notifications between certain hours or as you see fit. Consider “muting” channels or conversations so that there is no indication when new messages are present. There are a few options to send notifications to others:

@channel v. @here

There are two ways to notify a team on Slack: typing @channel notifies everyone in a channel. Typing @here will notify anyone who is in the channel who is present at the time. Both of these should be used rarely, with @here nearly always preferable to @channel. Think of @channel as the Emergency Broadcast system that sends an audible notice to everyone’s phone versus @here as shouting in a room to get everyone’s attention.

@user

When you use @(username) or even type the first name of someone in Slack, by default, it will create a notification for that user. If you only want to mention a user, but not necessarily notify them directly, consider modifying their name. Instead of writing, “Jake recently updated the manual,” you could write “J0rk, J4ke or Jak3 recently updated the manual.”

Using @user will not notify a user who has set DND, however, Slack will give you the option to “break” through their DND if you need to notify the user right away. This should only be used in true emergencies.



Organize Your Conversations:

If your communications tool permits, organize conversations around the same topic with multiple members of the team. These organized conversations are called Channels in Slack. Channels can be public, meaning any member of your district’s team can search, view, or join, or they can be private, meaning only members of the channel can search, view and invite other members to the channel.

Channels are a great way to create specific conversations with a select group of people. Districts may want to create an HR channel with district leaders and members of the HR department and a Finance channel that includes members of the finance department. Private channels can facilitate conversations between people that are not relevant or appropriate for a larger audience. These channels can create internal spaces for teams or functional groups to talk about work in progress that would be impeded by broader input or distracted by other participants.

We don’t encourage districts to use Slack as their go-to platform to document decisions. However, if a decision is made during a Slack conversation, it’s best practice to send an email soon afterward to inform all stakeholders.

PRODUCTIVITY:

Tips to Maximize Working from Home

It's important for districts who enable their teams to work from home to learn how to maintain a consistent schedule, determine where to work, and decide how to create clear boundaries between work and personal time.

Here are 10 tips shared by the Ogden School District for developing work habits that ensure an effective and enjoyable home-work environment.

- 1 MAINTAIN REGULAR HOURS**
Having clear guidelines for when to work and when to call it a day helps many remote workers maintain work-life balance.
- 2 OVERCOMMUNICATE WITH YOUR TEAM**
It's easy to forget that you're all experiencing work differently because you're not in the same physical space.
- 3 DRESS FOR THE DAY**
What you wear doesn't matter, but changing outfits can help normalize the work routine.
- 4 CHECK YOUR SURROUNDINGS**
Before you join a video call, check yourself and your surroundings.
- 5 ASK WHEN YOU NEED HELP**
You can't count on someone noticing that you're struggling with something or hearing audible sighs.
- 6 SET GROUND RULES WITH PEOPLE IN YOUR SPACE**
Set ground rules with other people in your home or who share your space for when you work. If you have children who come home from school while you're still working, they need clear rules about what they can and cannot do during that time.
- 7 KEEP A DEDICATED OFFICE SPACE**
Not everyone has a separate office in their home, and keeping two machines isn't always realistic. Instead, dedicate a desk and some peripherals only for work use.
- 8 DON'T WORK FROM YOUR BED**
At the very least use a table (if a desk is not available) and a chair.
- 9 SCHEDULE BREAKS**
Know the district's policy on break times and take them. Give yourself adequate time during the day to walk away from the computer screen and phone. It's worth it to get up, leave your computer, stretch, and walk around.
- 10 DRINK WATER THROUGHOUT THE DAY**
Also, don't forget to eat.