Choosing and Using Virtual Tutoring Platforms

In this National Student Support Accelerator webinar, we will be discussing how to choose and utilize a virtual tutoring platform for your program, if that is an option that your program would like to consider. As virtual learning has become even more prevalent, this mode of instruction can pose significant benefits to your program.

Throughout this webinar, we will look at what virtual tutoring platforms are and why they can be a good option for your program, what problems with virtual tutoring to be aware of, how to choose a virtual tutoring platform, and how to facilitate sessions effectively in a virtual format.

A virtual tutoring platform is an online conferencing system that programs can use to facilitate virtual tutoring. Possible options for virtual tutoring can include video conferencing software like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, conferencing software made specifically for online learning, like BigBlueButton and GoBoard, or programs that are specifically designed for online tutoring.

Virtual tutoring can be a great option for students even when in-person tutoring *is* available. Among other benefits, virtual tutoring allows students to gain access to tutoring no matter where they are located, and is often a more cost-effective option than in-person tutoring, and can be easier to scale-up. It can also be observed in real time and recorded for reference, not only improving student safety but improving parent and teacher insight into students' progress during sessions.

Despite these benefits, your program should be aware of some common problems that can come up when using virtual tutoring platforms. One such problem is with accountability, as students' families may need to play a bigger role in order to ensure that students attend sessions and are able to properly use technology without problems. Virtual tutoring can also lead to problems with building connections between students and tutors, and in terms of time, virtual conversations take longer due to an accumulated lag. Shortening lesson transitions can help with this!

Now considering how to choose a virtual tutoring platform that is the best for your program, let's first consider what capabilities you would like your platform to have. Possible capabilities can include live video conferencing, live direct messaging, a collaborative digital whiteboard, two-way screen sharing, real-time document collaboration, recording, asynchronous delivery, accessibility, and role-based access controls. Asking questions like "Can my platform connect students and tutors over a live video chat with camera and mic?" and "Can students access session recordings or transcripts afterwards for review?" can help your program design what options you would like to make available to your students and tutors.

You should also think about the following platform considerations when choosing a program that

is right for you:
- How much specialized training will tutors and students need to use all the platform's useful features?
- Is the software's interface intuitive for both students and tutors to navigate (considering if the software is accessible for all students, and if the interface is not overwhelming)?
- Will infrastructure limitations such as slow internet connections or old devices prevent students from using the software at school or at home? For this question, make sure to not test your software in ideal conditions on new computers. Test on the devices and internet connections that your least well-equipped students will use.

Next, let's consider how to effectively facilitate virtual sessions as a tutor. In terms of what tutors should do to prepare for a successful virtual tutoring session, it is important to use your best technology, which includes using ethernet, not wifi, if possible, as well as a separate microphone and webcam, and bright, diffuse lighting. Make sure to know your platform by testing out features and being prepared to assist students with this, and be engaging by looking directly at the camera and having a non-distracting background. Make sure to get to the session early, have materials ready, and keep track of the time as well.

In terms of student preparation, make sure that students are provided with extremely detailed instructions on how to start and log in from square one. Stick to a schedule that is communicated with students and families, and set your session engagement norms early. Also make sure to keep your interfaces consistent, and utilize sharing your screen to show, not tell, your students how to do something. Lastly, explicitly model each step in a new process for students (whether that pertains to new software or new academic skills).

When presenting your content during a virtual session, remember to practice your sessions beforehand and watch your recordings to find what to improve on. Create and display a structured agenda for your students, and make sure to outline your gameplan in a way that is not simply you reading from a script. Make sure to also make your thinking visible, and use many mediums to present your information. Lastly, present multimedia like videos yourself through screen sharing, rather than directing students to a link to look at on their own, and provide students with additional resources at the end of the session.

Finally, remember that it is important to make your virtual tutoring sessions as interactive as possible. Give students extra time to hear you by waiting after you speak, and prioritize student voices in your sessions first. Also make sure to give students multiple methods for interacting with you and your session content, check for understanding after modeling each new concept, and don't simply talk without giving your students an opportunity to apply what you are discussing. Watch your students work to make sure that they are staying on task, and make sure to provide specific feedback rather than undirected praise or general comments. Lastly, remember to give short closing assessments in order to make students' progress visible, and try to strategically pair students together if you are using a small group format.

Thank you for watching this National Student Support Accelerator Video on choosing and using virtual tutoring platforms. Be sure to check out the Accelerator website at the link below to find
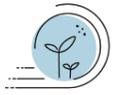
the complete collection of Accelerator tutoring tools, including those utilized in this video. Thank you!