

Determining Students' Needs

Identifying student needs is a continual process in which teachers gather information about student interests, abilities, social and emotional development, support requirements, and learning over time. Teachers can use diverse methods to gather information and identify needs based on whether blended or online instruction is delivered synchronously or asynchronously. Student needs can be categorized as academic or non-academic, where non-academic needs include social-emotional and physical needs.

1. What types of needs do my students have when learning in online environments?
2. How can I determine the academic needs of my students in online environments?
3. Why is it important to address social-emotional and physical needs of my students, in conjunction with addressing their academic needs?



to Consider

Assessing student needs is a continual process in which teachers gather information about student interests, abilities, social and emotional development, support requirements, and learning over time. Identifying those needs, which can be academic or non-academic, is crucial for student success. Determining student needs can be challenging within online environments due to lack of real-time observation, lack of technology accessibility, and the difficulty related to confirming that students are individually responding to their assignments without outside help.

Use several approaches for determining student needs in blended and online learning scenarios. In synchronous online environments, live check-ins, class polls, live interviews, real-time dialogue, and game-type activities can be used to identify needs. Tools such as SurveyMonkey, Google Forms or Microsoft forms, Kahoot, Quizlet Live, or Quizzizz can be used to gather immediate feedback from students and confirm whether they have mastered the instructional content. For asynchronous online classes, virtual quiz tools such as Gimkit, discussion forums and surveys, or interactive tools such as Nearpod and PreziVideo can be used to gauge student understanding and needs. To fully support student academic needs, it is important to identify whether students have skill and knowledge gaps or if they need additional academic challenges. Likewise, to fully support student non-academic needs, it is beneficial to offer a safe space for students to check-in and engage in one-on-one conversation. Determine student access to technology equipment and materials for blended and online learning scenarios. Verify access to required materials, physical or technological, prior to implementing blended and online lessons. This information can be obtained through written communication via mail or email, verbal communication via phone call, or through provided or publicly posted online surveys.

Knowing student needs is essential to providing inclusive, respectful, and accepting online classroom environments. An inclusive and positive environment will bolster student engagement and promote a feeling of safety that encourages students to seek support when needed. Students who feel emotionally and physically safe are more likely to have higher achievement and growth. Five core elements for social-emotional development are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Consider adding daily social-emotional check-ins to routines at the beginning of a synchronous online learning classes or including journaling as a tool for self-reflection and expression during asynchronous activities in online environments. It is also important to consider student physical needs within blended and online learning scenarios to ensure and maximize their growth and success. Determining student needs is challenging, but is vital to provide students with quality learning opportunities that foster their academic success.

KEY Elements