

## **Teacher Qualitative Opinions Regarding Requiring Students to be on Camera During Remote Instruction**

Names of respondents have been removed

### **Lamprey River Elementary**

No concerns with staff, students, or parents.

Teachers would find it challenging to ensure students are engaged if they can't see them

This age group needs the face to face interaction to keep them engaged.

Some students with anxiety, that with teacher permission, do put up the filter instead of being live on the camera

Speaking from a remote teaching standpoint, on a basic level when students keep their camera on it helps us determine whether they are engaged in the lesson or not and even sometimes their level of understanding.

More specific to our grade level, the vast majority of the work that our elementary students complete is still in workbooks or on paper that they turn in every two weeks. Cameras on during live lessons allow us the daily formative assessments of student work that help us to differentiate and pace lessons appropriately. Without watching students produce work during our live lessons, we are left waiting two weeks for any information on how they are doing with their academic progress and assignments. This, I think, is the most important argument for keeping cameras on at our level.

We understand that certain situations call for exceptions (I have a student who does not turn his camera on most of the time because of a specific issue related to his IEP). In addition, Google Meet now offers a blurred background if anyone is concerned about others seeing anything in their surroundings.

### **Iber Holmes Gove**

I feel like the policy should remain as it is. I personally feel that if kids are allowed to turn their cameras off, that just opens things up to anything (them playing on phones, listening to music, watching tv and not paying attention to the instruction, etc...). I've had luck with kids letting me know if they need to turn their cameras off, and when they have it's been very brief (a few seconds), so why change what is working? My wife's as well as my daughters' schools all have the same policy.

I find that the majority of kids who refuse to keep video on are those who prefer not to work. I understand the shyness factor, but I strongly feel that we are all going to need to get comfy on camera henceforth. There are a few cases for legitimate need not to be on camera, but they are rare.

In terms of school board decisions, I believe it depends on their intention. Do they want to use cameras to help with accountability? Or are kids whining to parents who are whining to the school board?

By the way, I dislike being on camera myself, but I recognize the value of it.

I agree with what Julie said about those that do the work tend to keep their cameras on. I try to keep my students engaged with signals to help me see if they are understanding or choosing answers. If a camera is off, I cannot get these performance/understanding indicators. I have students that have their camera off, and I have to remove them from the class because they are away from it when class ends and I have another class starting. Cameras should be on in my opinion. That is how I know if students are actually in my class. When the camera is off, they can be away from it and we would not even know.

I truly dislike being on camera, but I am not teaching with it off because I don't want to be on.

I agree with \_\_\_\_\_. Students who tend to be hard at work want the camera to be on to show they are working. We have no idea what is going on, or way to intervene with someone if we cannot see what they are doing.

I also agree with what has already been said. I think unless a student tells me in advance about why their camera is off, I assume that they're not engaged or sitting there.

I agree with everyone else. I work with small groups and if I can't see them I don't know if they are understanding the material I am teaching or what is being discussed. Most of my students are used to being quiet and blending into the background. Some of my ADHD students walk around during class or twirl the laptop around if I don't stop them. It is very hard to read when your laptop is doing a 360. I also require the students to have their microphones on too. I sometimes have babies crying in the background which is distracting to the students. I guess remote learning is what it is. Unless parental support is there it makes it difficult for the teachers to teach and the students to learn.

I feel I am more effective when I can see if the kids are understanding the concepts that I am teaching. Let's have them keep their cameras on.

As I am reading all of these emails it sounds like it has been very difficult to get the students to engage in remote learning unless you are able to do as much damage control with their environment as possible. I think that it is great that you all are dedicated to helping your kids learn the best they can given this situation. I also know that being on the camera can be a challenge for some students. I know that what I do and what you do is very different in regards to what is happening during video chats, but what I do want to remind everyone of is that there may be some situations in the homes that students cannot control. For example: someone walking around shirtless in the background, someone yelling at another child in the background, parents arguing, a parent having a tough day and expressing their feelings on the phone to a family member, the child having to watch their sibling (thinking more of the older kids here), etc. Now is this ideal environment for any child to be learning in? HECK NO, but is it their reality. While it is ideal to have these kids on video at all times, being mindful of certain kids situations could be the difference between kids showing up, or kids just deciding they are not going to attend. Maybe there is a way to check in with these students who are not showing their video and helping them figure out the best way to go about this. If we find that it is to play games or not actually participate in class - then yes being held accountable is highly important. If it is because they are having issues in the home that they do not want their peers to be aware of - maybe finding ways to help this student - whether it is through the use of support from a counselor - etc. Just some food for thought! I appreciate you all for all your hard work and dedication!!

My preference is for them to have their camera on.

My first reason is selfish. It is much more enjoyable for me to teach to faces than to a wall of static avatars. A class is not just me--it is the give and take between me and them and each other, and with their cameras off, that energy, that flow of give and take, drops drastically. The vibe of a remote class already is very different from an onsite class, and not seeing each other's faces would make it even harder. Not having a camera on makes it easier for a kid to sit back and be passive rather than actively engaged.

Second, seeing them helps me to quickly check for understanding. Since their mics are muted unless directed otherwise, I often ask them to give me a gesture to indicate their

understanding--give me a thumbs up if you can see what I am presenting, give me thumbs up if you're ready for me to move on, put your hand up if you have a question, etc... If their cameras are on, I also can see their facial expressions to see if they are confused, and I can see if they seem to be getting restless and need a break or to move on to a different activity.

Third, this is how I know that they are there. I am required to take period attendance. There have been times when I have called on students who have their cameras off, and there has been no response, because they were not there and had not indicated in the chat that they needed to duck out for a time.

I also like that they can see each other. They already are isolated at home and not with their peers; the Meet sessions are where they can have some visual social interaction, even if it is in a from-the-shoulders-up fashion.

Again, this is just my preference. I get that some kids have valid reasons for not having their cameras on 100% of the time. To make it easier for kids to have their cameras on, I suggest that the student Chromebooks have the blur feature added that I have access to on my computer; the blur feature blurs out the whole background, and the only thing in focus is the person, not the background. This may help many students feel more comfortable having their cameras on.

My thoughts on cameras is a bit different than my colleagues so far. I do agree that having the camera on makes accountability easier and helps us ensure that the students are engaged. Where I differ with some of my colleagues is how this is achieved. I have heard many of them state that "the camera must be showing their whole face and not just the top of their head". While I understand this, I, personally don't mind as long as I can see them there and know they are engaged. I think the expectations (whatever they are), must be clear to both staff and students.

Now, on the other hand, I am tired of fighting with these kids. Multiple times a class I remind them that cameras need to be on.... And some still refuse. I think that, if we are going to enforce it, we need to have a consequence system in place for the students. A referral isn't going to do much, in my opinion.

So, I think cameras can be important, but I am done fighting with the kids about them and would like a system in place that the kids know and will be responsible for.

I have some reservations about requiring students to have their cameras on during remote learning.

I would like to believe all students are coming from safe environments where they feel safe and loved at home. However, we may not be aware of students living in a domestic violence shelter or homeless shelter where there will be strict confidentiality rules to protect privacy.

I do not disagree with the other teachers about the cameras helping to ensure that students are on task and engaged. I realize this would only impact a very small population of students, but we can't simply know who this would impact. I understand that this student could just have their camera's off while other's don't but this might single that student out . . . Not sure what the answer is . . .

For me, no screens would be detrimental. These kids are young. We use responsive classroom to build relationships and make connections. You can do that if you can't even see their faces. I can judge first thing in the morning if they are doing OK or not. When their screens are off they are not always paying attention. It is difficult to know if they are bored, confused, or struggling, as most won't tell you when they need support. Maybe at a high school level like Janice, but not for the young students. I have complete confidence that allowing students to turn their screens off would result in mass disengagement. We could eventually get many to stay involved, but I think it would be our most fragile students that would lost. I am not willing to take that chance. If a student is having a bad day or needs a break, I always give them the option to turn it off for a bit. They can email me with extenuating circumstances, but for the most part they need to be on.

We actually created a classroom constitution where they voted that screens being on would be one of our laws. If they are worried about the home, they blur the background, so we can only see their face. (New feature in Google Meets) Students are supposed to be engaged with both teacher and classmates and, therefore, meeting some of the socializing criteria. Kids crave seeing their teachers and classmates; they miss that enormously. And while remote can never take the place in up front and personal instruction and socialization, hearing and seeing each other in real time. and watching the body language cues of others, is an important part of feeling human and integral to future development for all.

I feel as though families going into remote knew the expectations and are OK with it. If I had known no screens was an option, I would not have chosen to be the remote teacher. Janice spoke about the fact that she calls on her students (high school) to see if they are engaged, I can't call on every child every few minutes, we wouldn't accomplish anything. I already spend a

significant amount of time trying to get them to put down toys and phones to focus. Could you imagine if they knew I couldn't see them?

I would also like to add that as the parent of a high school student, I feel my child is far less engaged with no live sessions and screen face to face contact. He needed that for his emotional well being and it is not happening this year. I can see it taking a toll on him. He continues to sit and work all day alone on his remote days, (and remains an honor roll student) but I am grateful for the hybrid days that keep him going.

These are just my initial thoughts. With everyone sending you input, hopefully it will be enough

I tell my students that I want the cameras on UNLESS there is something going on that shouldn't be seen. That being said, I am finding that the same few students tend to disappear from the meets regularly and as often as not they do not answer me when I call on them. this tells me (You know, because I am wise beyond belief) that they are not really there and are not paying attention. Students who do not want to do work in the classroom are hard enough to motivate, but a remote student who doesn't want to work is in another league. We need all the accountability we can get.

### **Raymond High School**

Concerned for privacy of students and myself. The age of students I work with would mean a parent or other unknown person would use the computer and view with them.

I do not want other parents watching a child have a behavior and my response to the behavior. I am also uncomfortable with not knowing who is on the other side of the camera.

Cameras should be on during the instructional part of class and group activities. I don't believe students' cameras need to be on for independent work, but the teacher should remain available.

Students must have their cameras on during remote instruction, it is a necessity. Having students' cameras on assist with measuring student engagement.