

Lessons learned from Covid-19 — and navigating to the 'New Normal'

Joan Cavallo

Principal St. Albans City School

Prek-8th Grade (about 750 students)

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Summary of thoughts to be presented June 17th, 2020 to The State Board of Education

This document is not being presented as the voice of principals, my presentation will represent my thoughts and opinions, with input from other educators in my school.

What have we learned from this?

- We learned that we can mobilize quickly, learn constantly and keep smiling.
- We found that we needed to define when we were sprinting and when we needed to move to a marathon. It was hard to shift gears.
- Working together was critical because it takes more effort to plan and prepare for remote learning and we needed each other more than ever.
- Synchronous learning was more engaging and successful than asynchronous.
- Families need solid communication that is consistent and concise.

What worked well?

- Summer Feeding (food distribution) was one thing that really worked well. Barriers were removed over night that we had been working on for years.
- We found a way to connect with every family in our school. For some it was just to make sure they knew we were here for them and to check in on the students. For others it was an amazing partnership. There were many variations in between, but in all cases we had more contact than usual.
- Remote learning worked for a small percentage children and families and should be an option going forward.

What were the challenges?

- Being connected to one another is so important. The students needed us and their peers and we needed them and each other. Missing each other and the traditions that help create a sense of belonging was felt by everyone.
- Issues of equity were magnified. Children that had parents that could navigate the pandemic, create routines and support learning, had many positive experiences. Yet some homes are overwhelmed by significant mental health challenges without a pandemic so the pandemic made that more intense and children were there full time. Also poverty, food insecurity, and a general lack of access to resources is felt by too many students and families. Those children

could not have access to the same educational experiences. That equitable access is a unique service that in person school provides. At the same time some families lost their incomes and that added to the stress in the household. Another group that we normally don't consider for equity are children at day care. Those children did not have the same access because their parents had to work. School is more than a place to learn academically.

- Teachers with children of their own were often torn between their two roles and often felt that they were not able to provide the same service as those without children. Working from home often meant we were always available.

How can this experience shape education going forward?

- We quickly decided to use a Learning Management System to organize learning and help us be consistent and share resources. This will continue as we go forward, and our work has highlighted ways we can use technology more effectively for remote and in person learning. By using the LMS regardless of if we are in person or remote, we will be able to provide a remote only option for families that do not want to take the risk of in person learning. It can also support students that need to be absent for various reasons, and possibly eliminate snow days. Our effort now is to work on more consistency, which parents requested.
- As educators, use of technology and skills in using it increased dramatically and that is something we will take advantage of.
- Students were not as independent as they needed to be to be successful remotely. This is something that we do for them, and we need to explicitly teach these skills as soon as they are with us.
- We have more family engagement than ever before, and this is something that we can learn from and continue to improve. Remote or in person, family engagement helps students be successful. We used many creative tools to get the involvement. In many cases since they couldn't come to us, we went to them.

It is not over. This is what we've learned from the Remote Phase. As we go forward we will be coming back into the building with our students and many new expectations designed to keep everyone safe while we learn to live in a new COVID-19 world. We will be continuing to learn how to navigate a 'new normal'. There are many more challenges ahead.