

How quickly things change...

It is hard to believe that just over a month ago we were still in school, welcoming hundreds of students into our buildings every day, proceeding with instruction as usual, focused on the upcoming state assessments, and beginning to anticipate the special events that make up so much of the calendar for the last few months of the school year. We were deep into the “golden time” of the school year; the time when our classroom culture is strong, our students are thriving, and students and teachers alike are beginning to see months of hard work beginning to really pay off in the form of new skills and understandings. And then, our world turned upside down.

It was just about noon on Saturday, March 14th, when we got word that schools would be closed indefinitely. By 3:00 pm on Monday, March 16th, teachers, assisted by SRPs, had pulled together, developed plans, created packets for their students, and were headed home to begin to figure out what the coming days would look like. Within that same time period, our mental health staff identified over 170 students, K-12, who would, we suspected, need some extra support and care during this tumultuous time. Our food service staff made plans to donate food commodities to distribution sites in the community; our operations, maintenance and custodial staff began their efforts to deep clean and keep our buildings safe; and our technology department readied several hundred laptops for deployment to students who would need them in order to continue to learn at home. Every building and every department was supported by members of the clerical staff who stepped up to do whatever was asked of them to ready schools to close while learning from home continued. All of that happened, practically over night.

Four weeks later, we have begun to settle in to some sense of the “new normal”. While most of us are working from home, we have continued to prioritize taking care of our students’ physical, emotional, and academic needs while learning to utilize new forms of technology and balancing the demands of home and work when there are no definite boundaries between the two any more. We continue to deal with a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety as we adjust to life in the midst of a global pandemic. We feel sad for our students who are missing out on spring sports seasons, musical productions, final concerts, and other special events that traditionally mark the end of the school year. We miss our students and our colleagues.

Everything we knew about school changed so quickly and so suddenly. And yet, what hasn’t changed, what will never change, is the importance of our relationships. Our relationships with our students, with our colleagues, with each other, and with our community will keep us strong and keep us safe. That is the most important thing, and that will never change. Those relationships will allow students to continue to flourish and feel safe and cared for even when we can’t be with them every day. They are what will allow us to take care of each other, even from afar. They are what will bring us back together, joyfully, when this is all behind us. And it will, someday, be behind us.

Until then, I wish health and wellness to you and all of your loved ones. Stay safe.

Melanie

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PLC work at it's finest - and most important!

The PLC Advisory Committee began it's work in earnest in January. One of our first tasks was to create a "why" statement for PLC work in Pittsford. We wanted to create a succinct statement that reflected our beliefs about why deep, systemic collaboration about teaching and learning was important for us in Pittsford. Our performance data is strong, our students do well, collaboration is already one of our core values - so why the emphasis on developing ourselves as a Professional Learning Community? We knew that being able to articulate this clearly for all members of the Pittsford community was essential to any efforts to grow our PLC culture.

At our March meeting we officially approved the following WHY statement to serve as our touchstone for all future work:

WHY PLCs? Because...

We believe in a collective responsibility for all students' learning.

We recognize that our work is complex and no one person can do it alone.

We strive to continuously do better for our students and ourselves.

During that same meeting, we began to articulate what we hoped to see happening relative to the support and growth for PLC work in the coming months and into the 2020-21 school year at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Our conversations and ideas were rich, challenging, and exciting. We couldn't wait to come back together and start to really dig into the work.

And then came word that schools would be closed until further notice.

Students would have to learn from home; teachers would have to figure out how to teach the kids from home. As educators, we were sad, we were worried, we were stressed.

And then, teachers and administrators began to collaborate like we had never collaborated before.

Why did that happen? It happened because **we believe** in a collective responsibility for all students' learning and so we had to figure out, together, how to reach all students with what we agree is the most essential learning during these challenging times. It happened because **we recognize** that our work is complex and no one person can do it alone. We recognized that we had to learn - and learn quickly - how to leverage technology, how to build in differentiated options to lessons being sent home, how to provide feedback to students remotely, how to balance our own personal home-life situations with the needs of our students. That is complex work, and no one can, or should be trying to, do all that of that alone. It happened because **we strive** to continuously do better for our students and ourselves, and so we have been motivated like never before to adapt, incorporate new approaches, learn new skills, and to gently and flexibility accommodate for the diverse and complex needs of students living through an unprecedented challenge.

So now, out of necessity and more than ever, grade level teams and teachers of the same or similar courses are collaborating around the most essential learning for students and determining the evidence we will ask students to provide to us of their learning. Teachers are sharing ideas and plans, tips and work-arounds, resources that they have used for years or that they are newly discovering. Teachers are supporting each other, and their students, through this most challenging of times. If nothing else good comes out of this pandemic (and I actually do believe that a number of good things will emerge), we have certainly used this opportunity to strengthen who we are as a Professional Learning Community.



Regents Exams cancelled for June

At its April meeting, the Board of Regents made the decision to cancel the administration of the June Regents exams. At the most basic level, what this means is that students who are enrolled in classes that culminate in a Regents exam, including the LOTE Checkpoint B exam, will be exempt from taking that exam. There will be no impact on a student's ability to receive course credit, or on the diploma time they are granted, as a result of this decision.

So, what does that mean for us, at a more practical level? It means that for the first time ever, teachers of Regents courses do not need to feel bound to the expectations of the Regents exam in determining the most essential knowledge and skills for students to be focused on for the remaining weeks of the semester. It means that teachers are freed up from thinking about things like "test prep" and "Regents review questions" as they do their planning. It means that teachers are empowered to decide, collaboratively with their like-course colleagues, what really is the most essential learning to focus on in this unique, remote-learning environment. And yes, it could potentially mean that some students will see this as an opportunity to disengage or back off a bit on putting forth their best effort, knowing that they no longer have to "know this for the test".

Teachers of Regents courses, I would invite you to view this as a unique and very valuable opportunity, one not to be squandered! Working with your course-alike colleagues, determine together those "really most essential" things you believe your students need to accomplish, not only to receive credit for your course this year, but to be prepared to move on to the next step in their sequence of learning. (If you are having trouble deciding what is really essential, versus what is "nice to know", ask the teachers of the next level course what they expect students to know and be able to do in September!) As you think through those essentials, you might discover that it's not about the next chunk of content knowledge, but rather it's about the skills, practices and cross-cutting concepts. Use this time to build up your students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Focus on their ability to read, analyze, and synthesize documents, artifacts, data, and graphs to discover new meaning. Expect of them authentic application of their skills. Find ways to use the pandemic - a truly historical event full of scientific, mathematical, environmental, political, cultural, and societal implications - as part of your instruction. Provide students with options for how they provide you evidence of their learning. If you are worried about them "checking out" without the Regents exam looming overhead, find opportunities to encourage them to remain "checked in" with your skills and content in ways that you've never been able to before due to the pressures of the Regents exam.

The Board of Regents made the right, and only reasonable, decision for our students. Let's seize this chance to provide our students with an opportunity we might never get again!

COVID website

**Pittsford
Schools**

The district has a robust website dedicated to all things related to the [COVID-19](#) outbreak. Included on that page are community resources, resources to support both physical and mental health needs, information about accessing free Wi-Fi, and where community members who are food insecure can go to access meals. There is also an extensive page devoted to [Home Learning Resources](#). Housed within this page are learning websites for teachers, students, and families to access, as well as tips on time management, perseverance, suggested schedules, and other items that may be of help to families as we navigate this new world of remote, home-based learning. We continue to add to these pages as we create and discover additional, high quality materials. Teachers should feel free to reference any of the items on these pages when sending learning plans home to students and families, and encourage students to take advantage of some of the fun and enriching activities provided on some of the websites.

Resources to assist you...

Teaching in the time of COVID has meant that all of us have had to adapt and learn new skills. Staying connected with students, delivering meaningful lessons, and providing students with effective formative feedback can be challenging even in the best of circumstances. And those “best of circumstances” depend heavily on being in the same room with your students on a regular basis! Doing those things in a remote learning environment is a whole different ball of wax. Fortunately, the District is committed to providing teachers with as much support as needed so that, together, we can figure this out!

Our Technology Department has put together a number of embedded professional learning sessions on the use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom for connecting safely and effectively with students. Additional supports have been developed on screen casting and the use of teacher webpages to support remote learning. These, and many other resources, are available for staff on the [Technology and Data Services](#) website. Click on the Helpful Technology Documents - [Elementary](#) or [Secondary](#) - to find a robust menu of documentation to support the use of instructional technology. Many of the tools that we are finding ourselves dependent on now, will serve to enhance our instruction when we return to our classrooms.

In addition to technology support, Julie Barker is offering an opportunity to learn more about the use of effective formative feedback to promote student learning. Providing formative feedback is a critical component of instruction. Finding effective ways to do that in this environment can be a challenge. All teachers should have received an email from Julie on Friday, April 10th outlining two different options to engage in this online learning experience. There is something there for everyone, and a couple of different options for ways to participate in this experience, so I encourage you to look for that email and take advantage of this opportunity!

If there additional resources that would be helpful to you, or additional training that you are seeking to support your COVID instruction, please do not hesitate to let us know. Just as you are learning to provide instruction to your students remotely, we are learning how to support teachers through the use of online learning experiences. Together, we are learning, growing, and supporting one another!

A little humor goes a long way...

When the going gets tough, the creatives of the world find a way to keep us all smiling. I’m sure all of our social media has been flooded with some of the parodies and other forms of silliness that have sprung up around the coronavirus. You may have already seen some of these. If not, enjoy. Even if you did, they are worth a re-watch.

[Zoom Where it Happens](#)

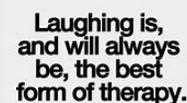
[Don’t Stand So Close to Me](#)

[MASH and the Coronavirus](#)

[Family Lockdown Boogie](#)

Also, if you are a fan of Randy Rainbow and haven’t yet had the chance to enjoy his ode to Governor Cuomo, just do a quick search for “Andy! - A Randy Rainbow Parody Song”. It’s priceless, but not entirely appropriate for linking here!

Maintaining a sense of humor really is key to maintaining a healthy outlook on life, not to mention sanity. I hope you are able to find a reason to laugh each and every day!



**Laughing is,
and will always
be, the best
form of therapy.**

AUTHOR
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