



# Geneva Community Unit School District 304

## Office of Learning & Teaching

### Remote Learning Update

5/26/20

#### Introduction

Students in Geneva 304 have been participating in emergency remote learning since Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. With three days left it has been quite a journey. We began this process with a focus on shared understandings of connection, normalcy, engagement, the importance of school, and grace, and as we reach the end of this school year we know it is important to reflect upon our experiences while looking ahead to the future. Below you will find some of our reflections and considerations regarding the last forty-three days of learning organized into three sections: **Why We Are Proud, What we Have Learned, and Where We May Go.**

#### Why We are Proud

In this section we briefly highlight some of our most positive observations regarding our experiences during remote learning.

***We had many pieces in place.***

Over the last several years we have worked on several critical issues that served us well as we entered emergency remote learning. Our strategy for achieving 1-1 with devices meant that students could access learning at home, our focus on professional development ensured that our teachers had a foundation of skills that they could bring to the table, our steady shift toward innovative curriculum resources gave teachers many tools to access, and most importantly, our vision for developing self-directed and adaptable learners and teachers helped give us the capacity to roll with the punches and do our best even in unprecedented circumstances.

***We adapted quickly.***

Speaking of unprecedented circumstances, we should all be proud of how quickly the field of education adapted to this new paradigm. To be sure, it has not all been perfect, but then again, no institution in modern history has ever been asked to change its approach so fundamentally in so short a time. All educators should be proud of the ways we adapted and all that we accomplished during this closure. As always, the educators in Geneva 304 rank up there with the best.

***We had high levels of engagement.***

In Geneva 304 we maintained a relatively robust participation rate amongst our students throughout the closure. At the secondary level upwards of 80% of our students were engaged in remote learning activities throughout the majority of the closure and that number reached approximately 90% for the



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elementary level. These are impressive numbers, especially when we consider the unique circumstances that we know all families may be facing at home.

### ***We continued to improve.***

As we have shared previously, our teachers continued to learn and apply new skills throughout the closure. During the closure, our teachers participated in numerous professional development sessions, learned new skills and strategies, and applied those skills and strategies in supporting students. Prior to the closure a majority of our staff had never participated in a virtual meeting and certainly had not facilitated one. By this week, we had teachers regularly meeting in virtual settings with groups of students as young as five years old. This should be celebrated.

### ***We gave and received grace.***

We began this process by encouraging all of our stakeholders to give each other grace in this uncertain and challenging time and by and large we have seen the better angels of our nature prevail. Our teachers developed supportive and accommodating lessons and grading practices, our families shared positive messages of affirmation and encouragement, and, as noted, our students did their best to participate and remain engaged in challenging and unfamiliar circumstances. While this has all certainly been very difficult, we pulled together in some incredible ways and truly gave each other grace, patience, and understanding.

## **What We Have Learned**

Through our reflections on the past few months we have also learned several important lessons that are sure to be constructive as we forge our path ahead.

### ***Remote learning is hard.***

This situation has reinforced many things and the most important is that there is no remote activity that can replace the type of learning that happens when children are together in a classroom being supported by a great teacher. So much of the meaning-making that happens in school is nurtured in the small moments and inter-personal interactions that occur when people are learning together. While we know everyone did their best to marshal on in this unique environment, it is important to note that this was so challenging precisely because that which is most vital to education is also that which is hardest to replicate across copper and fiber.

### ***Everyone is experiencing this differently.***

When students and teachers are learning together in school, we can control many more variables than we can when everyone is working from home behind a computer. As we connected with students, teachers, and parents it became clear that everyone experienced this closure in their own unique way. Some people settled in quickly while others needed more time to adapt. Some of our stakeholders felt a great deal of stress and anxiety while others appreciated some aspects of remote learning. Some



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longed for more explicit schedules while others appreciated the opportunity for more autonomy. And while some were concerned that there was not enough to do, others felt anxious and overwhelmed. Ultimately, we learned that having everyone at home made for an exponential increase in variables that led to significantly more stress for all of our valued stakeholders.

#### ***Balancing autonomy and consistency is a challenge.***

Geneva 304 has a proud and long-standing philosophy of nurturing personal innovation amongst our educators. This philosophy has helped cultivate our district vision and contributed to many instances in which organic innovation has occurred for students and staff, and this pioneering spirit is a tremendous asset to our district. At the same time we know that even in the best of circumstances, providing consistent experiences for our teachers and students is critical, and, as noted above, when our primary learning space shifted to a virtual environment balancing the natural tension that connects these two values led to some challenges. We recognize that as we move forward we will need to continue to work toward achieving balance in this regard.

#### ***Accountability is a critical factor.***

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Governor's office provided a great deal of guidance regarding this emergency closure. Much of this guidance centered around the important need for equity and maintaining students' social/emotional well-being during this challenging time. While the spirit of this guidance is to be lauded, we also learned that some of the conditions, especially those focused on issues like grades, attendance, and time spent learning, impacted our capacity to maintain the high standards to which we are accustomed. Geneva 304's tradition of excellence is built upon a foundation of these high standards, and we know we must consider factors related to these issues as we look ahead to the future.

### **Where We May Go**

While we are only just reaching the end of this emergency closure, we know that the 2020-2021 school year will be here before we know it, and we are already hard at work planning for our future.

#### ***We have and will continue to reflect on our experiences.***

We have already received a great deal of feedback regarding our time remote learning and we are certain to receive more. In the coming days and weeks we will work to reflect upon and synthesize that feedback to help us make the best possible decisions we can for the upcoming school year.

#### ***We will continue planning for the year ahead.***

There is still a great deal of uncertainty surrounding potential learning scenarios for the 2020-2021 school year. We anticipate receiving additional guidance and recommendations from the ISBE and the Governor's office as the summer progresses, and we will work to make the best possible instructional decisions for our students in a timely manner while ensuring that we focus on the safety and health of



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our entire community. In the meantime, we are hard at work considering a variety of structures and approaches that could help us serve students given a variety of variables.

### *We must remain adaptable.*

As the old saying goes, the only constant in life is change, and this situation has certainly proven this to be true. We recognize that while we must ensure that we are prepared, we must also continue to be creative and adaptive thinkers as we work through the challenges that lie ahead. In that sense it will be critical that we remain flexible in our planning for the 2020-2021 school year, as this situation will undoubtedly continue to evolve.

### *We will maintain our focus on our students.*

As always, the education and well-being of our students will continue to be our primary focus. As we reflect on all we have learned and assimilate the guidance that we are certain to receive, we will continue to strive to prepare our students to be self-directed, creative, and collaborative communicators.

## Conclusion

As we move into the summer, we will continue to gather information and reflect on the last few months as we look ahead and consider potential scenarios for our future. While we all certainly hope we can return to in-person learning with our students in the fall we will remain steadfast in our commitment to planning and preparing to educate our students in whatever environment is required during the 2020/2021 school year and beyond.

