



PENNSYLVANIA TEACHERS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Taking the Temperature

April 1, 2020

Dear Pennsylvania Teachers:

Two and a half weeks ago, Governor Wolf announced that Pennsylvania schools would close due to an increase of coronavirus cases. By the time he made the announcement, my school district had experienced a Covid-19 scare and was embarking on online learning the following day. Other districts instructed their teachers to have no contact with students. Some districts provided professional development time so that teachers could learn new tools and strategies.

A lot has changed in these two weeks. A lot has not.

School districts are, necessarily, responding to this challenge in a myriad of ways reflecting their financial capabilities, school leadership and resources for teachers. This week, teachers across Pennsylvania are beginning to teach their students in this new environment. Some will have the luxury of meeting with them over Skype, Google, Teams or Zoom. Others will dial home phone numbers to connect. A few will even sit down and write good old-fashioned letters. Many have already had teacher parades through communities to provide students a connection to their teachers. From Philadelphia to Titusville, Pittsburgh to Hawley, teachers will do whatever it takes to connect with their students. While the methods of establishing connections with our students will be new, the impetus will not. Teachers will try to do what is best for their students.

What is best for our students?

The answer for this will be as complex as the countless systems that we are activating in order to reach our students. However, we must keep this question at the very forefront of our mind and at the base of every action that we take as we engage our students. We must, first, take care of the emotional needs of our students. Some already have lost family members to COVID-19. Some are facing increasing incidences of prejudice and malice. Many are in homes that are not safe and the increasing fears of illness and economic pressures are paralleled by an increase of abuse within their own homes. Many are scared. Most are bored.

*So, **what** is best for our students?*

While many of our students will be happy to sleep for an extra hour or two, most will be seeking normalcy and structure. They miss us. They miss their friends. They miss breakfast and lunch. They miss sports and clubs. And yes, they miss learning. But mostly, they miss human contact. What is best for our students is connection. They want us to know how they are; be that afraid, excited to share a new recipe or show you their pet, bored, angry about missing senior year or simply happy to see us. They want to give us a high five, fist pump or hug. They want us to tell them that it will eventually be normal again. This is why we are teachers. This is our bread and butter. This is all that we really need to do. Math, reading, writing, music and art will all happen...just maybe not at first.

What is PTAC doing?

We are working to support you, the amazing teachers of PA. We are taking a three-prong approach:

1. Blogs from PTAC members will be posted frequently to share their experiences, ideas for teaching in this new environment and support for all teachers in the Commonwealth.
2. Our PLCs and resource center will provide opportunities for teachers (PTAC members and others) to engage with each other and to build/recommend resources for successful teaching (sharing and brainstorming both online and more traditional paper-based ideas).
3. Finally we will be "Taking the Temperature" through surveys and writing up our findings, as well as sharing narratives from the field. COVID-19 has changed the landscape of education and will have ramifications that far outlast our current situation. We want your voice to be part of the narrative. Please share your experiences by completing our surveys.

Of course, we would also love it if you would apply to be a member of PTAC. You can find the application on our website; ptacvoice.org

One final thought, one of the best ways to take care of our students is to take care of ourselves and our families. As Dr. Levine reminds us daily, "stay calm, stay home, stay safe". Our students need you.

With deepest gratitude and respect for PA teachers,

Mairi Cooper
President, Pennsylvania Teachers Advisory Committee
2015-16 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year