

Notes from the Wednesday's Parent Zoom Meetings

Wednesday, March 25

Here is a summary of the presentation for those who could not call in on Wednesday: The black text is the main bullet points; the blue text is my talking points/notes.

Updates:

1. We miss you and your children - This has been hard for us as teachers as we tend to be extroverts and we need human interaction.
2. Appreciation and Thanks - We acknowledge the teachers for their hard work in preparation of lessons, and for the time they have spent learning and developing the skills needed for delivering instruction remotely. Thanks to parents for stepping in out of necessity for the younger students. I cannot imagine the challenges of having 1-2 young ones and having to also work from home at the same time. Finally, for those of you who are providing health care and essential services to the broader community, we thank you.
3. Communication has been great (Feedback is very helpful.) Thank you for the positive encouragement that we have received, and for the great suggestions.

To continue to offer people the opportunity to hear from us, we will have these call-in meetings weekly on Wednesdays.

Support for students/families/staff

Links on PCS website at http://www.pcs.k12.nj.us/poldoc.cfm?doctype_code=Announcement&doc_id=15930
Counselor recommendations- Pages of materials that are helpful from Mrs. Kushner. Use these resources, reach out to Mrs. Kushner, Lisa, Gail, me if you need some support for your children.

CDC , NJDOH, Governor's Daily Address - 2:00, etc. Take care to remain informed but also take breaks - It is overwhelming right now.

State of the State

- How long will school be closed? Clearly the Governor is indicating a longer period of time. Certainly not before spring break. I think we have to be ready mentally for a longer timeline - 8, 10, 12 weeks, end of school are all possibilities.
- NJSLA testing - State testing has been cancelled - indicates the longer period of time the school will be closed.
- Stay home/Be safe- This is a teachable moment - Model for children the importance of taking this seriously, follow guidelines and recommendations, but be careful not to raise anxiety in the messaging.

- Spring Break. We will not have instruction over spring break. Teachers have families, young children, elderly parents, we need to regroup.

Remote learning

I am thinking of this in terms of three phases:

1. Phase 1: Establish the new normal.
 - a. Teachers are getting up to speed.
 - b. Identify/explore most effective technologies that are available, iron out kinks, established schedules and routines.
 - c. Recognize that there are a lot of moving pieces and we are moving a lot of people in this endeavor. (Song parody of 'I will Survive' by a teacher.)
2. Phase 2: Establish and teach in this new routine - familiarize, normalize.
3. Phase 3: Expand/improve Build on it.

Grades

I know that some people have been stressed by grades during this time. I think that we have established a workaround for the automatic calculation of missed HW assignments, etc that results in a low grade early in the marking period. (If there are only 2 HW assignments, and one is missed, PowerSchool automatically shows an "F" grade.) Please put your minds at ease; Students will not be penalized with low grades as a result of this transition/situation. We are considering a P/F approach for the end of the year. We will reevaluate and make determinations as time goes on. Of course learning counts without grades, but I want to be careful here to not undermine learning with a message that there are no state tests, there are not grades none of this "counts."- However, this is no time to stress people out any more as a result applying our existing grading practices during a totally different and challenging instructional mode.

Amount of work - Put this into the context of the moment. Do not stress about the volume - do what you can right now. We will adjust. Arts are potentially healthy diversions, important ways to nourish the mind and spirit, don't see these as assignments that must be completed, or else, etc. .

Streamline delivery - We are working on this.

Teachers are developing and refining this aspect.

I have gotten feedback on the challenges of getting to the work: we are working to make a more uniform and consistent approach to Powerschool Unified classroom, and Google classroom. Trust that we have heard the need for earlier posting, later due dates, established routines for posting to support the varied organizational needs of students.

Synchronous schedule - This is set to reserve time- teachers are using the time as they see fit e.g. splitting the hour between two classes, assigning other work instead of a synchronous zoom class. We have heard the request for this to be less fluid, and to have scheduled times. We have heard the request for more synchronous instruction. And, the request for more of it at the lower grade levels.

We will build to that, there is a schedule for ¼ for this to be at set time that we are finalizing. Please understand that Zoom, while amazing, is still highly limiting and we cannot just “have regular class.” We will grow as we enter the third phase. We will employ technologies more effectively to teach a lesson- Jamboard, Screencastify, Edpuzzle, Licensing for the upgraded versions, White board with Zoom, etc.

Also teachers are developing norms - mute, raise hand, share whiteboard, view all students, split groups, etc.

On a side note: I have two daughters in HS, out of school since last Monday 8 days. Younger daughter has had - 2 classes, older - 4 classes- in 8 days for all subjects combined. I am not saying that we want to settle for a low bar, but note that all teachers/schools are in development on this statewide.

[Teacher] Office Hours- I think that this is still developing. We need to get better and establish this routine. I will be getting feedback on this. We want parents/students to have 1:1 access to teachers.

Some considerations

Screen time - Find alternatives for your children. We need to be on screens for remote learning, so we need to balance this out for our children with deliberately screenless activities.

A silver lining moment perhaps: There is an opportunity to have some quality family time: For example, we broke out the old family videos of when my children were young.

Connecting with others - We are looking to find ways to connect with younger students in smaller groups, for example the grade 3 teachers had lunch with the students the other day. We will develop more creative solutions.

Assembly on Friday - We will have an all-school assembly on Friday on Zoom. (This actually already happened and it went well.)

Learning space set up - I think that this is important. Have a workable set-up for your whole family. Get students out of their rooms if possible for a work space, otherwise they will be spending all of their time in one room primarily.