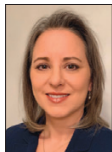


GUEST OPINION

What learning looks like in 2020-21

By Jennifer Wimmer

Students who are “smiling with their eyes” and teachers holding parent-teacher conferences over video or phone are examples of the many changes with in-person instruction for the students, staff, and families of the West Bend School District this school year. These creative measures and observations are just one small part of the story of the 2020-2021 school year. The most important part of school continues — a high level of learning.



Wimmer

For some students, distance learning has been a part of their learning experience due to being placed in quarantine after close contact with a COVID-19 case. A big step in making distance learning the best experience possible was the school district securing a Chromebook laptop for each child in

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Instructors have worked very hard to adjust and maintain their teaching and learning goals for their students. Denise Lyneis, an eighth-grade math teacher at Badger Middle School said, “Communication is such a key element in learning. In order to encourage and continue this practice, I have taped rectangles on the floor in my classroom so the kids can rotate their desks to have different partners to share with and still remain physically distanced.”

While the laptops are also used within the school buildings, they are very integral to a continuation of learning if students are in quarantine. Document cameras that teachers attach to their laptop in the classroom support students at home so they can see the materials being used in class. All instructors received additional training in distance learning in the summer and they are now implementing it for students in quarantine.

Physical education teachers have purchased additional equipment so students do not have to share and have implemented physical distancing in a gymnasium. Art teachers are using videos for art project demonstrations. Music teachers are creating “instruments” such as chopsticks and dowels to help students learn about sound and music while they refrain from singing. Music lessons are being conducted via video and students are learning music theory and composition when they cannot sing or play as a group.

More than 900 West Bend School District students and their families chose a full- or part-time virtual education for the 2020-2021 school year with the West Bend Virtual Academy. While continuing to work through scheduling and technical issues, the academy is running and the students continue to be part of the West Bend School District with access to school-provided supports and extracurricular opportunities. Families will be given the opportunity to switch the instructional option for their child(ren) for the second semester.

Especially at this time, we must address the social and emotional needs of our students. Jill Mahlberg, a kindergarten teacher at Fair Park Elementary, said, “Despite the many changes being made for the safety and well being of all, kids remain resilient and enthusiastic about school. They think about their learning, set goals, take steps to reach their goals, and then set higher goals. They learn to recognize, talk about, and successfully manage their emotions.”

Are the students happy to be back considering all the changes within their physical spaces and their school day? Rick Bury, a third-grade teacher at Green Tree Elementary, said “Students enjoy learning! Students enjoy being together! Students have been able to learn with classmates even though they are distanced from each other. Students are practicing ways to help one another; being kind and respectful to others, and are practicing ways to become better students and people.”

Fair Park Elementary fourth-grade teacher Jill Riffel concurs: “Although the students are masked during the day, it’s easy to understand through their words and actions how they feel about being back in school...GRATEFUL. Grateful for learning, grateful for friends, grateful for fun and games, but most importantly grateful for being together.”

At the West Bend School District, we are all grateful for the partnership with our families, staff, and the community to help follow pandemic safety guidelines that clearly assist us in keeping our doors open and we ask that this partnership continue as the winter months approach.

(Jennifer Wimmer is superintendent of the West Bend School District.)