



MAY 2020

SCHOOL MINISTRY

Mailing





Alight

FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS



We Miss You!

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

For 173 years, LCMS schools have enjoyed a rich history. Each day has started with teachers greeting students and welcoming them into the school building. Families freely walked in to drop off supplies and visit with other families. Students made their way to classrooms, connecting with friends while gathering books and supplies for the day ahead. Teachers settled students in with a devotion together, and the day officially began with the Word of God.

In March, the daily routines of schools changed overnight when the coronavirus spread to pandemic proportions. In a matter of days, schools shifted from conducting in-person classes to remote learning, with shelter-in-place and social-distancing directives creating one of the most trying and challenging times in modern history. Through it all, the continuity of student learning and the health and safety of the school community remained a priority. Across the country, faculty members with varying levels of experience with remote learning worked together to determine how to best meet the needs of the students entrusted to their care.

Many Lutheran high schools had

experience with digital learning and were able to provide specialized online classes for students that blended learning experiences with a mixture of online and on-site teaching. E-learning days, implemented during inclement weather and professional development days, provided a foundation for the transition to full-time remote learning.

Some elementary schools were also exploring e-learning experiences and using online learning management systems as digital hubs to keep content and assignments organized and easily accessible for students. In addition, early childhood educators maximized the use of online platforms to create and share videos of themselves teaching short lessons and reading books aloud. With attentiveness to providing “hands on” activities for children in early childhood centers and schools, they prepared weekly packets of crafts, manipulatives and age-appropriate learning activities that were delivered to homes or made available to pick up at school.

Educating the “whole child” remains critically important when educators reflect on how well remote learning is serving students and families. Meeting the needs of students spiritually,

“This is not a break from school, it’s a heart break.”



cognitively, creatively, socially, emotionally and physically in a remote setting requires collaboration, creativity, innovation and perseverance. The spiritual care of families continued in creative ways as well, as pastors and teachers worked together to livestream praise time with preschoolers and chapel services to reach out to children and their families.

As the pandemic stretches on and school closures extend through the end of the year, the school community struggles. Teachers and families lament, “This is not a break from school, it’s a heart break.” Over and over, students and families consistently express how much they miss their teachers. Although schools use video-conferencing platforms to conduct class meetings with the entire class or hold individual meetings with students, it does not replace the face-to-face interactions that are so deeply missed. Teachers grieve not being able to be with the students they know and love. The separation brought about by the current restrictions only reinforces the importance of the relationships formed in the school setting.

Throughout this extraordinary time, teachers are continuing to develop new mindsets and skills in terms of flexibility, adaptiveness and resilience. These skills are

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29: 11–13).

critical as educators reflect on student learning during the pandemic and beyond. Summer is coming, and as the focus of education shifts to the beginning of a new school year, many questions are raised about what that will look like. Once again, teachers will be using the knowledge they have gained this past year to refine their work and improve their teaching methodology — in the classroom or from afar — to continue educating students.

Whether classes meet in person or online this fall, teachers will continue to train up children in the way they should go. Their work extends God’s kingdom one child at a time by sharing the precious Gospel message of God’s promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. This mission is timeless, and it is the aspect that remains steadfast and enduring for Lutheran educators. It makes an eternal difference in the lives of children and families, and this promise of hope is the cure for hearts broken by separation.



Computer File



What is Next in Technology: The ‘Learning Model’ and Technology

When I planned this year’s *Computer File* articles, I never imagined that this month’s topic would take on the meaning that it has in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Seemingly overnight, schools were forced to reevaluate the “how” of their educational model in order to continue to educate students without the use of a physical school building. Decades of tradition, school facility innovation and ingrained teacher mentalities were suddenly irrelevant. Schools that may have avoided questions about a changing “learning model” in the past could not avoid these discussions any longer. In an instant, the ideas of “school” and “learning” would never be the same.

So, what does this mean for the concept of a learning model moving forward? To be clear, this is in no way meant to suggest that there is a single effective model for learning. That’s exactly the point: there is no single model of learning that will work best for every student, teacher, school or classroom. The learning model is driven by a few key factors, which are both internal and external to the learning community (school). Internally, there are factors that impact the direction and methodology of the learning model, such as the availability of resources, training and staffing, and the physical location. Externally, the community in which a school is located has an impact as well, especially related to how education is viewed, its importance and the manner



in which it is integrated with the rest of society. Determining which model for learning works “best” takes into account each of these — and a multitude of other considerations — to develop the “how” that a community of learners will pursue.

Keeping in mind that the most essential piece of the learning model is determining what is most effective for your situation, and knowing that this *is the Computer File* article, there are some general trends that are beginning to surface when it comes to the impact of technology on the learning model. Although the pandemic forced many schools to quickly move to “remote learning” using technological means, and this

helped encourage the growth of related resources and technologies, there are a few other major changes coming that need to be explored as well.

Remote Learning

Let’s get the big one out of the way first. If you had to pick one buzzword in education today, it would most likely be “remote learning.” In its most general definition, remote learning could be explained as a simple 1:1 attempt to replicate the previous classroom experience. Forced to change overnight, teachers and administrators latched onto this idea of replication since it required the least amount of change and kept some semblance of the previous learning



model (classroom, etc.). Through technologies such as Google Classroom, SeeSaw, Canvas and others, schools are able to replicate the learning model in an online space and provide an experience that's as close as possible to previous learning without actually being in the classroom. Moving forward, these technologies will continue to allow for this movement of "learning" online, but it's important to note the distinction between "teaching" and "learning." In many cases, remote learning is not remote teaching; it is only a substitute for in-person traditional teaching. Only through the integration with and acceptance of other technologies can this model of learning include actual "teaching" as well.

'Conference Call' Learning (Synchronous Learning)

If you had to pick a second major buzzword, it probably would be "Zoom." The technology of video conferencing is not new by any means, but it had rarely been utilized in the classroom setting. Now, the need of industries and corporations for connecting with others in faraway places has enabled teachers to connect with their students as well. Moving forward, schools and teachers will become more equipped to host synchronous learning where all students are "on" at the same time. The technology to do this is quite robust, but schools have lagged in purchasing or implementing it — and that will be a quick shift in the near future.

On-Demand Learning (Asynchronous Learning)

The flip side is asynchronous learning. This is learning on your own time and at your own pace from wherever you are. Society is already accustomed to doing this through the use of

tutorials and cooking walkthroughs on streaming video sites, but traditional teaching previously utilized live lessons and did not adopt recorded teaching. With students and families needing to juggle work schedules, internet issues and shared family devices, asynchronous learning will allow for students to keep learning within their specific contexts. On the teacher side, recording lessons and creating these resources for students takes time and training, so be prepared for additional time and resources to be allocated for this type of learning model.

Device Agnosticism

Knowing that the learning model is what will determine the technological needs of the learner, there is one caveat. Regardless of the model or methodology, all decisions made about online solutions, apps, programs, textbooks and so on need to work on *anything*. Students today are managing their entire learning experience on a phone, a Chromebook, an iPad or even an Xbox. Keeping this fact in mind as a teacher or administrator is key to removing the technical challenges that students may face so that they can simply focus on learning. Something may be cute and a great resource, but if it does not work on every device, then you have automatically alienated a portion of your students or put an additional hurdle in place for them to navigate.

The Future

As we look at what is next in technology in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, here are a few things to look for that are on the cutting edge of remote learning:

- 1. Virtual Reality Classrooms:** Companies are developing classroom experiences that only exist in a virtual reality setting. Requiring a VR headset, these instances give students the true feeling of sitting in a room alongside their fellow classmates and teachers.
- 2. Personalized Student Avatars:** Along with the VR classroom, student avatars are under development to represent the student online without using their actual likeness. Think of a classroom full of animated and interactive Facebook avatars.
- 3. "Remote" Classrooms:** If students are unable to meet in person all at the same time, some districts are looking to do "remote classrooms" where the teacher teaches multiple locations via telepresence. This keeps everyone on the same learning track even when they can not be in the same room.
- 4. Paperless Everything:** This isn't a new technology, but the move to paperless is gaining traction in more and more schools. Keep an eye out for innovative ways to get rid of cumulative folders, check in/out sheets and hall passes.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS



Special Education Throughout the School Year: May



Congratulations! You've made it to May, and to the end of a school year unlike any other! That alone is a feat worthy of mention for all educators, parents and students this year! One of the big topics that often comes up at this time of the year, and may come up even more this year in particular, is summer learning and providing extra support for students who struggled during the school year. There have already been numerous discussions about this in light of the recent disruptions to school calendars and learning. This stems from the concern that students will start next school year academically behind, and students who already have learning challenges may experience even more summer regression. It's a good time to talk about what recommendations may or may not be appropriate for your students during the summer months.

The first, and most important, suggestion may seem counterintuitive from a special education perspective, but it is one that is easily overlooked. Encourage parents

to give their child a break! It is easy to look at how far behind struggling students are and think that summer should be a time to try to catch up on those skills, but it is equally important to make sure there is enough of a break from school and formal instruction. Everyone who has been teaching the last couple of months knows that formal instruction has changed significantly, but it is still happening! Students will need a break this summer, maybe even more than ever. Many struggling learners experience extreme frustration, stress and anxiety, and they may lose confidence during the course of the school year because of their challenges. It is likely that this time of distance and remote learning will exacerbate these difficulties for some. It is also likely that students who typically do not struggle in school will experience these emotions and need a break as well. During this time, encourage parents to view the summer months not as a time to catch up academically but rather as a time for students to rest and enjoy summer as usual, so they will hopefully be ready to start a more typical school year in the fall.

This summer is also a perfect time to remember that each child is *fearfully and wonderfully made* by our Creator. Encourage parents to find an activity that their child is interested in or has an aptitude for and give her time to explore that area. There are often summer clubs or camps specific to these interest areas, and even if students are not spending their time with phonics worksheets or math facts, their brains are engaged! If formal clubs or camps like this are not an option this summer due to continued restrictions or other reasons, encourage parents to find other ways to help students explore these areas of interest with hands-on activities



and projects or related videos. Activities like these are often the things that get cut from a child's schedule during the school year with the extra time and effort required for homework and other things going on in the family. Summer is a great time to make sure parents focus equal energy on a child's strengths and develop those as well.

If there is a need or a request for additional summer academic activities for students, E.A.R. is a helpful acronym to keep in mind. "E.A.R." stands for easy, appealing and relevant. Any activities you may choose to send home or that parents may incorporate for their child should follow these guidelines for the summer.

Easy does not mean mindless work, or work that is way below a child's instructional level. It simply means that work chosen should be at a level where the student can succeed and also be challenged enough, yet avoid undue frustration. If the student is working with an adult during a certain timeframe, the work should be at the child's instructional level. For reading, this is about 70–90% of the reading comprehension level and 95% or above of the decoding and fluency level. Independent

work should be above 90% of reading comprehension and 99% of decoding and fluency. For math, a problem set where the student is achieving between 85% and 95% of the problems correct is a good instructional level that avoids frustration.

Appealing is also very important for summer work, especially if the parent is the one working with the child. It will be an uphill battle trying to get the student to work on something that does not stimulate the child's interest or make him willing to try. Make sure there are choices for the students about what activities to do first, or what book to read, and also make sure there is plenty of positive feedback for effort! If needed, encourage parents to work in a fun activity or outing as a reward for completing academic work during the week.

Finally, make sure any recommendations are **relevant** to the child's learning and needs. Help parents choose materials or programs that not only are relevant to the needs of their child but also the child will view as relevant to her life.

As much as we want our students to succeed, we know that all students in all schools are in similar situations and will return in the fall in a different place academically compared to other years. Let's help encourage parents to use summer as a time for a break for their children and a time to explore their God-given abilities, not just their disabilities. The same applies to you as teachers! This year has been a challenge, and a huge accomplishment for all schools and educators. Remember to give yourself time to rejuvenate, and allow God to take away some of your worries about students being behind as they begin next school year.



Please reach out to us at lsem@luthsped.org or visit our website at luthsped.org and let us know how we can support you in your ministry during this time or over the summer!

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A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY



Professionally Speaking



SCRIPTURE: 1 Thess. 5:16–24

Joy:fully Lutheran

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

This year, *Professionally Speaking* has used the theme verses from the Synod as its basis for monthly writings. As the year draws to a close, reflection is appropriate and valuable in recounting the year. It’s assessment time.

› **Rejoice:** Did you review your mission statement this year to see how it encourages joyful learning? Did you do a walkthrough of the building and audit your website for reminders of joyful living? Did your board consider the time available for your school’s administrative needs?

› **Pray:** What is your assessment of the prayer life of your school? Your teachers? Each classroom? Yourself? Did you teach with a dependence on Jesus or dependence on self? What was your go-to for help, for wisdom, for strength? Was your parent group a prayerful group?

› **Give thanks:** No, giving thanks for the end of the school year is probably not appropriate here,



especially if it includes an attitude of “Good rid-dance.” Instead, what is your litany of thanks to God as the year comes to a close? For baptisms? For the renewed health of a student, parent or staff member? Is it thanks for financial resources to meet the operational needs of the school?

➤ **Encourage:** How did you encourage the next generation of Lutheran school teachers, Lutheran pastors, DCEs and deaconesses? Did you take a child aside and say, “You should consider being a pastor.” “You should be a teacher. You love learning, you love leading and you are a people person.” Or did your disposition cause more harm than good this year?

➤ **Discipline** (verb): What healthy habit(s) did you add this year? How did a confession of being God’s masterpiece (EPH. 2:10) drive a discipline of better spiritual, physical and mental activities?

➤ **Review and Study:** What policies came up for review this year? What was the criteria for assessment? What curriculum areas were addressed? Are you prepared to talk dress code enforcement at the end-of-the-year faculty meetings? How do any of these topics relate to the school’s purpose?

➤ **Meditate:** What were the spiritual disciplines that you personally addressed? How about your school’s practices? What did you encourage through school communications that helped families decide to dedicate time for worship, prayer, service and devotions?

➤ **Faithfulness:** Consistency should be so easy to do, but were you the model of consistency this year? Reports on time? Deadlines met? NLSA report on May 15?

Whatever your report card, the results probably come up short. It’s probably a report card that shares results that do not pass by *any* means — standards based, subjectively or objectively. The evaluation has determined you didn’t hit the target and makes for a disappointing assessment of the school year. And we administrators don’t handle criticism very well.

“Joy:fully Lutheran”? Eh, the joy is short-lived and weak.

Fully = fully sure that more could have been done.

Lutheran? Not even sure the community even knows or cares we’re here.

Schools do a lot of assessing. From report cards to surveying, from accreditation to board evaluations, schools are in the process of evaluating, determining the present status and planning for the future. Maybe as we complete the year and send off our NLSA reports, we should apply our own teaching of the faith. Maybe it starts with knowing our own faith.

“When we are blessed by God and born anew, do we seek to feel the pulse of our own faith? Doing this is a dangerous displacement that leads us away from the Reformation understanding of faith. The moment we turn aside and look aside and look back at ourselves and our own doings instead of at God and God’s promise, at that moment we are left alone with ourselves and with our own judgment about ourselves. We will fall back into all the uncertainty of the defiant and despairing heart and look only to self and not to the promises of God” (Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification* (Fortress Press, 2017), 44).

It’s OK to assess for school improvement and for skill improvement. It’s not OK if it weakens faith and life.

So as the year ends, heed the apostle’s pleas: rejoice ... pray ... give thanks ... share the Spirit ... teach the faith ... hold on to the faith ... choose godly habits.

May the summer months of doing the above have you restored for another year of service.

And “may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 THESS. 5:23–24).

Faithful. We know He is. He is already working (or, should I say, is still working!).

Professionally Speaking // MAY 2020

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