



**Testimony of the  
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)**

**Public Hearing Regarding  
Continuity of Education**

**Presented to the  
Senate Education Committee  
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**By  
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## Testimony

Good morning/afternoon Chairman Langerholc, Chairman Dinniman and members of the Senate Education Committee. I am Rich Askey, President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association. Thank you for inviting PSEA to participate in this hearing and on this panel today.

Without question, the COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis of a scale none of us has ever experienced. Navigating the constantly shifting and daunting impacts of a disease we don't fully understand and for which treatment is not yet fully within our grasp, requires an unprecedented level of grace, resilience, and – most of all – an unwavering commitment to protect the health, safety, and economic needs of all Pennsylvanians.

PSEA is truly grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, and to your colleagues for demonstrating such commitment through the swift adoption of Act 13 in March. That action has kept our public education system functioning and even thriving in some locations since our schools physically closed two months ago. I would also like to personally thank you, Chairman Langerholc, for recognizing the graduating seniors in your school districts who have missed so many special moments this year. That was a truly thoughtful act on your part.

I would also like to take a moment and publicly recognize my fellow testifiers- Secretary Rivera and our education partners – I know how hard you all have worked on behalf of Pennsylvania's students. Thank you – your efforts do not go unnoticed.

As an educator for over 30 years in the Harrisburg School District, I am no stranger to challenging circumstances. But this is unlike anything I have ever experienced. The realities of the past two months have tested each of us to the extreme. Yet even under these extreme circumstances, one constant remains - educators are committed to providing students with the support and resources they need.

I can personally attest to the **amazing** acts by public educators across the Commonwealth that remind us just how critical our school system is for the good of all Pennsylvanians. We have seen and heard first-hand from parents, students, and others all across PA that our school system is essential to our communities and it plays an integral role in the lives of so many.

As the President of PSEA, I have received hundreds of emails and phone calls from members in every region of the state sharing their stories of exciting successes and innovations happening in their districts – but also of the significant challenges and barriers for connecting with and supporting our students who need it the most.

For me, I have always found that I can only gain the most understanding about what is really going on “on the ground” when I hear it directly from those on the front lines. Which is why when asked to participate in this hearing, PSEA went directly to the experts – our members – and asked them to share in more detail what is happening. We compiled and summarized the responses and included them in the written testimony provided to the Committee prior to this hearing. We respectfully request you read through the feedback from our members – it is raw, honest, and insightful.

But in addition to sharing the written feedback, I’d like to take a moment this morning and share just a couple of stories from educators that I believe capture both the challenges and successes of the efforts happening to ensure students continue to learn.

**The first story is from Nancy, an educator in the Greater Johnstown School District.** (I know the Chairman has a deep knowledge of that particular school district and has worked hard to support it - thank you for that Mr. Chairman).

- According to a recent survey conducted by the district, nearly half of the students in Johnstown lack internet access or a device to connect to the internet. Online education would be impossible in those circumstances, so Nancy has relied on instructional packets. However, getting that material to students who are chronically, episodically or transitionally homeless is extremely difficult. And those are the very students Nancy has

tried the hardest to reach.

- In her own words, Nancy said:

*“Some students lack school supplies, food and some even shelter. I and other teachers have made home deliveries of supplies, created inventive ways to be in communication with them and sought business and industry partners to help us help our students. Our students are also now left in a home that may not be safe for them or be able to provide life sustaining needs for them. Our teachers, spending hours daily with our children, many times are the only constant some children have. **Our students need us, and we need them.**”*

**The second story is from Dave, an elementary school teacher in the West Shore School District.**

- Dave’s students do not have district-issued tablets, so he is educating them through a mix of online education, email, zoom sessions as well as physical packets (as Nancy had to do in Greater Johnstown).
- Dave does everything he can to make it work and meet his students needs where they are – but this patchwork method, while necessary, makes it much harder to prevent some students from falling through the cracks.
- He has said that the number one issue he faces is the lack of internet access for many families—a problem we see across the commonwealth.
- Dave goes the extra mile – literally - to help prevent that though. If a student stops interacting, he drives to their home, bringing a basket of food just in case they need it, drops off materials, and hopefully gets a quick look at them from a distance to make sure they are faring well.
- Dave is bringing weekend “powerpacks” of food to 25% of his students right now and is regularly making wellness checks with his school’s counselor.

- Dave knows how integral the public-school system is to his students' physical, mental, and emotional health and that he may be the only caring adult in some of these student's lives.

That knowledge comes with a heavy toll, and a heavy burden—one that many educators in addition to Dave and Nancy are feeling right now. The very kids who need us the most right now are the hardest to reach in this environment. We are worried about our students, Mr. Chairman. We are worried about them all the time. Its not something we turn off at night when we lay our heads down. There are very real social, emotional and mental impacts on students and educators from this crisis – and it is important we all recognize the affects that will have now and into the future as we approach planning for what education will look like for the 2020-2021 school year. Those impacts are not limited to the more extreme examples I have just shared, however. There are challenges faced by teachers and students in places that have high parental involvement, quality access to the internet and a higher level of financial resources as well.

**Stephanie is a teacher in the Abington School District.**

- She is also a mom of two young children.
- She teaches all day and tries her best to balance homeschooling her kids at the same time (in addition to all of the other responsibilities).
- Often both sets of kids—her students and her children, need her at the same time.
- She's also working hard to make distance learning engaging, learning skills to teach online and lesson planning deep into the night. Stephanie estimates her workday has nearly doubled.
- Despite the personal toll this schedule has taken on her, Stephanie was focused mostly on her students—especially those with special needs or who speak English as a second language—who she said are desperately missing the in-person services schools provide them.
- While her students are mostly engaged, she likened this moment to being more akin to crisis management than to teaching. And I think there is some truth to that statement.

I'm proud of how our schools and educators have responded during this crisis. I'm proud that PSEA has developed programs to help our members learn online teaching skills, that we have invested in online self-care seminars to support their mental and emotional needs. And, I'm proud of the thousands of dollars we have donated to local food banks—a service we know the families of our students are relying on. But I also know we are only in the first phase of this crisis. Moving forward will require significant commitment and resources to ensure students and educators receive the supports they need to provide continuity of education and a sense of community in whatever form that may have to take.

In addition, for schools to physically open safely it **will** require social distancing, greater sanitization of classrooms, buildings and buses and more health professionals in our schools, like nurses, counselors and school social workers. There is a lot we still don't know about this disease. But we DO know that opening schools without a comprehensive plan – which includes feedback by those of us on the front lines like the members this panel represents - will likely cause a new spike in COVID-19 cases, forcing some – if not all – schools to be closed once more. None of us want that.

Albert Einstein once said, “In the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity”. We are no doubt in a crisis – perhaps the biggest of our lives. But I truly believe there could be great opportunity ahead if we continue to partner together with a focus on providing all students the supports and learning opportunities they deserve.

Thank you for having me here today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

## **Our Stories and Policy Recommendations**

The realities of the past two months have tested each of us to the extreme. Yet even under these extreme circumstances, one constant remains - *educators are committed to providing students with the support and resources they need to succeed.*

Since March 13 when schools were physically closed, I have received hundreds of emails and phone calls from members in every region of the state sharing their stories and insights. They have shared hopeful messages of exciting successes, creative instruction, innovations, and educational solutions happening in their districts. And they have also shared their worries and their fears – for their students, their families, and for themselves. Even our members in school districts with the most ideal of circumstances – widely available broadband, technological devices, strong leadership, supports and processes in place – face significant challenges and barriers for connecting with the students who need it the most. And for those school districts that were already struggling due to insufficient resources – this pandemic has only exacerbated and further magnified that growing inequity.

PSEA truly appreciates the time our members have taken to share with us their raw, honest, and insightful observations during this time of upheaval in all our lives. Hearing directly from the experts on the front lines of this new educational reality during a time of crisis is essential to be truly informed. That is why we have compiled a sampling of this feedback and attached it to this testimony. We hope their observations and insights help guide you and your fellow policymakers as you continue to support the continuity of education for Pennsylvania’s students – now and into the future.

This experience, this disruption of our daily lives, has been traumatic for kids and adults alike – but I’m proud of how our schools and educators have responded during this crisis. I’m proud of PSEA’s development of programs to help members learn and enhance their online teaching skills, and that we have invested in online self-care seminars to support their mental and emotional needs. And I’m proud of the ongoing, diligent efforts of our statewide organizational

partners across the state as we collectively navigate this crisis with a singular focus on providing stability and essential supports to students, families, and communities across Pennsylvania.

**But I also know we are only in the first phase of this crisis.** Moving forward will require *even more* commitment, engagement, planning, and resources to ensure educators have what they need to provide continuity of education for students during the duration of this pandemic.

**Albert Einstein once said, “In the midst of every crisis lies great opportunity”.** We are no doubt in a crisis – perhaps the biggest of our lives. But there is also opportunity. Some may see this crisis as an “opportunity” to continue to dismantle the essential fabric of our public schools and public education in Pennsylvania. But that would not be opportunity – that would be a tragedy. This crisis has reminded each of us just how essential our public schools are for community and connection - and just how essential community and connection are for our survival. PSEA stands ready to partner with you to navigate this crisis in a way that truly creates opportunity – for students, for their families, and for our communities across PA.

### **PSEA POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION**

- 1) **Ensure PA schools have the tools they need to re-open safely next year.** Each of us shares a commitment to safely re-opening our schools next year and providing critical supports to students in this next phase of recovery. *This goal, however, cannot be reached if state funding for schools is reduced and the ability of school districts to manage their local budget is removed.* PSEA fully acknowledges that the financial impact of this disease will be far-reaching, and tough choices will likely need to be made. But for schools to physically open safely, it will require social distancing; greater sanitization of classrooms, buildings, and buses; certified school nurses to assess student symptoms and evaluate illnesses; counselors to help kids cope with uncertainty and trauma; and enough classroom educators to avoid overcrowding. Inflicting budget cuts will only make our schools more overcrowded, less safe, and lacking in the professional staff we need to survive and recover from this pandemic.



- 2) **Advocate for \$200 Billion in Federal Education Stabilization Funds.** Providing continuity of education cannot be provided if school districts and schools are forced to reduce essential programs and furlough thousands of classroom teachers, school nurses, psychologists, counselors and social workers, reading specialists, and instructional paraprofessionals as well as education support professionals who keep our students – and our school facilities – healthy, clean, and safe. It is therefore imperative that *Congress provide significant stimulus funding for state and local governments and at least \$200 billion in education stabilization funds to ensure continuity of education* and educational opportunities for all students. PSEA urges the members of this Committee to join us in our efforts to lobby the PA Congressional delegation for another COVID-19 stimulus package that contains the necessary and essential federal funding focused on protecting students.
  
- 3) **Address Pennsylvania’s “digital divide”.** Up to 12 million children nationwide live in homes without a broadband connection or modern online devices. Even in communities and homes with access, it is often still insufficient to meet the increased demand. And while there is no single solution or quick fix, Pennsylvania can no longer defer investing in the state’s broadband infrastructure. *PSEA urges PA lawmakers to 1) establish a clear process for broadband funding and infrastructure development with a prioritized focus on the communities most in need; and 2) lobby Congress to provide a minimum of \$2 billion in emergency funding for the E-Rate program, an already proven program that enables schools and libraries to connect kids at home and ensure they have a tablet or other modern device to do their schoolwork.*
  
- 4) **Support a comprehensive approach for planning and preparation for returning to school.** When students return to school next fall, they will need additional and unique supports to address academic and social-emotional needs. The re-entry and recovery from this crisis will be a long process, and there won’t be a one-size-fits all approach. But to ensure plans for reopening schools are rooted in a focus on student success and safety, the planning must begin now and must be informed by those educators working most closely with students on a daily basis.

5) **Provide essential social and emotional supports for students and for school personnel.**

There are very real social, emotional and mental impacts on students and educators from this crisis – and it is important we all recognize the affects that will have now and into the future as we approach planning for what education will look like in the for the 2020-2021 school year.

All students need supportive relationships and nurturing learning environments – but students facing additional stress or trauma need it most. The COVID-19 crisis will only exacerbate underlying conditions many of our students already live with – depression and anxiety – and some will feel elevated levels of isolation and trauma due to the death of loved ones, and the economic hardships hitting their families. The need for certified school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and nurses has never been more acute.

Educators are also facing challenges like they have never known before. Signs and manifestations of anxiety, depression, and trauma in students had already been on the rise prior to the pandemic and have only been worsened by the health, economic, and social realities facing them and their families. At the same time, educators are dealing with ongoing challenges in their own personal lives - managing their work assignments and learning new techniques for delivering instruction, while at the same time caring for their own children and possibly facing new economic and health hardships due to COVID-19. Educator burnout is very real – and the need for self-care and supports from the education system could not be more urgent. we urge all policymakers to recognize that our educators must have the supports they need to be healthy and balanced in order to support students during and after this crisis.

**FEEDBACK FROM PSEA MEMBERS:  
EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

*I truly feel like [my district] is being amazing with assisting both teachers and students. They have tweaked the workload to help students and we have a high rate of active e-learners. It is a killer for the artistic side of school because we cannot grow as artist and performers via zoom or google classroom posts and while students are actively engaging, the arts require feedback and a lot of it can't be given without being side-by-side with students.*

***Emotionally the arts allow kiddos to connect and express themselves in so many ways, but we can't connect to produce the next level over the internet. That is devastating for students and teachers alike. Kids are emotionally struggling - especially the ones from unsupported families and that is heartbreaking.***

**Catherine, Dauphin County**

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***I find it hard to balance teaching and my own family.*** My two children have about 2 to 3 hours of online instruction daily Monday - Friday. They have zoom meetings with their teachers, while I have online meetings and training that often overlap.

*I worry about my special education students. They need additional supports that I don't think are best served to them even in live online sessions. Many times the online group sessions are glitchy and spotty with WiFi connections, which makes it very hard for everyone in the session to follow along and understand what is being discussed. Overall there are many distractions.*

*Many students have parents that are still going to work, and they are not encouraging their students to complete assignments. **Mental health is already taking a toll on many of my students. I have had over a dozen parents out of 80 that have mentioned that they personally are struggling, their child is struggling, or their whole family is having trouble coping.***

*We are fortunate that both the district I work in and the district my children attend have been able to provide families with Chromebooks. Even with that, having multiple people on devices at the same time, connection is not always reliable even with good service plans.*

**Colleen, Bucks County**

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*Some aspects of remote learning are working, but most are not. I teach seniors in a district with high poverty. My engagement with students is around 65-70 percent. Many seniors have just "checked out" believing the school year is over. My colleagues and I agree that the current set up takes all the joy out of school and just leaves the drudgery. I have a handful of kids who are working better than they were before the shutdown. I have some who are at about the same level.*

*And I have a lot who have lots of technology questions, even though we used Google classroom extensively through the school year. Plus, in our district, around 15% of students still don't have*

*a device. We were able to get some technology grants, but the equipment is slow getting to us. We only have about four weeks left and we are still waiting on devices.*

*Our district still hasn't decided how to grade the last report period... Our district is looking to balance compassion with accountability, since we know we have many students who are struggling with family, economic and mental health issues.*

*We were given minimal training on how to engage students online. The training some teachers received was on how to use Google classroom which many of us already knew how to do. The training we need is how to truly engage our kids.*

*This crisis has highlighted yet again the vast disparity in Pennsylvania schools. Some schools didn't skip a beat, beginning online on March 16 – compared to our situation that I just described. And I'm well aware that we are probably not the worst situation in the state.*

**PSEA Member, Allegheny County**

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*Remote learning is not working. My district is a high poverty district. A phone survey to families resulted in 42% of families not having a device or connection for distance learning. This created the need to develop paper packets, then the need for collection and accountability. Many families are homeless and will not receive the packets or any chance at education. The divide will grow and the poorest students that need education the most to help them rise from poverty will be left behind even further. Our students lack school supplies, food and some even shelter. I and other teachers have made home deliveries of supplies, created inventive ways to be in communication with our students and sought business and industry partners to help us help our students. We are working harder - not smarter. We have full plates.*

*It is difficult to watch this happen, to not be able to be face-to-face with the students in the learning environment that we normally provide; one that is safe and effective. It is frustrating to sit in front of a screen and see that nearly 50% of the students have not checked in. We are truly building the plane in the air while we desperately try to keep each child grounded. It is disappointing to see less of a return on our investment. Our investment which has grown with last minute webinars, hours of trial and error, presentations and collaborative learning to be able to get the virtual classrooms up and running.*

*I wish all families that have the means honestly put forth the effort to join in and take advantage of what we are trying to do for them. Parents are seeing what great work we do in the classroom, despite the interruptions, varied capabilities and abilities our students have. They are becoming frustrated in adapting to parenting and teaching. **But the human component is missing in our distance education. This is very important to students in lower socioeconomic conditions and is vital to their success.***

*Our students are also now left in a home that may not be safe for them or be able to provide life sustaining needs for them. Our teachers, spending hours daily with our children, many times are the only constant some children have. Our students need us, and we need them.*

**Nancy, Cambria County**

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*Remote/distance learning is working as a review, but it does not replace working in the classroom with the students...we can't replace the small group and social interaction with their classmates. Many of my students do not have internet as it is an expense to some families. Most families are using a parent's cell phone for online things. Our school sends worksheet packets home. My parents like that, because they feel comfortable with it, can sit and watch their child. Our principal took care to listen to parents and teachers. My parents just wish their children were in school to have complete days of instruction.*

**Tricia, Mercer County**

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*On March 13, I told my kindergartners that we would have two more wonderful weeks left [before I transition to a new job]. I told them that they are going to love their new teacher and on March 27 I would bring cupcakes for an "old lady birthday/good-bye party." I hugged each one getting on the bus and told them, "Don't forget your leprechaun trap on Monday!" Then, I walked into my building and got the text - the Governor was shutting down schools for two weeks. I had just taught my last day and didn't know it.*

*During the emergency staff meeting about COVID-19, I got to tell my colleagues, "Thanks for everything – after 23 years of teaching here and 10 years as union president - goodbye". So much for long goodbyes. That weekend, I cried for the goodbye that was stolen from my students and me. In the weeks that have followed, my living room is my "office". I'm learning my new job remotely. I'm hoping I'm doing everything I'm supposed to be doing. Everyone is kind and patient as I learn via phone calls, Zoom meetings, manuals and e-mails. I check in on my kindergartners with a story on Dojo and mail them books and pen pal letters and encourage them to do the on-line materials and packets my team is using to keep them learning.*

*As I write this, my younger son is upstairs completing his senior year of high school on the computer. For days on end, I forced a smile telling him, "the positive is we are all healthy. We are all experiencing this crazy time together." But the trite comments don't bring back the cancelled track season, the cancelled travel soccer season, the cancelled National Academic games in Atlanta. Debates, plays, prom...cancelled. Graduation...TBD. Family vacation...on hold. Orientation for YSU...going to be done on-line. Picking out a roommate...done on-line with an asterisk...no promise school will start in August. He's a positive kid, but how much can you smile when everything keeps getting cancelled?*

*But blessedly, while we may cry in frustration and disappointment...we aren't crying tears of mourning a loved one. We are all in this together.*

**Shawnee, Mercer County**

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*Remote learning is working to an extent, but it is not working for all students. The hardest impact is on my students with autism. They are not in their usual routine and are missing the time being in social situations. Some of my students' parents are very busy with work and are not able to make sure their children are getting online to complete any work. It is also very difficult to Zoom with students when they are so easily distracted by everything in their home environment.*

*I feel the students in my district have the supplies they need, but I do feel badly because they often need more support and encouragement at home. I also feel badly for the parents who are working and doing everything that they are capable of to help their children.*

*My administration has weekly meetings to keep us up to date with the latest. I feel they are doing the best that they can.*

**Sara, Bedford County**

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*Distance learning is going well. Kids are missing school like crazy. While they get on the calls they struggle because they just want to be together. I've been on a roller coaster, but I am good now and we are going with "less is more" so the stress level isn't so high. I think [my district] has the best support during all of this.*

*Kids are really struggling emotionally. I had kids share on one of our zoom meetings that they were with friends this weekend. Another student then said to me "it's hard when some people listen, and other people don't."*

**Nicole, York County**

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*I am now into somewhat of a rhythm that works for me but I wouldn't want to do this [distance learning] all the time. It's extremely exhausting and I'm working more now than I did in the brick and mortar classroom. Time is irrelevant because I have parents contacting me for help at all hours of the day and night. I only have 13/24 students who come on to my Zoom meetings. The other students have parents who are working essential jobs, limited or no internet access, or no support at home. The kids who need the help the most just aren't getting it despite my many attempts at making contact.*

*I have taught myself the programs I need to work on and relied on other educators I work with or on Facebook groups. The school district is feeling their way through this and so I feel like we've been on our own. I feel tired and rundown.*

*A large percentage of my students don't have internet access or reliable internet. Some students are working solely on packets because of this. Some kids don't have any device but their parent's cell phone. You can't do "school" on that. It's been tough because I'm an Apple user so if a parent has a different device, I have to look up how to help them. Kids don't have the math manipulatives they need to be able to complete lessons (like base 10 blocks) so I've had to improvise.*

*Families have been extremely supportive and I've really enjoyed working more closely with my families than I ever had the opportunity to do before. Principals have been supportive because I am my local president and have tried to bridge a good relationship through this all with them. My super has been as well. **It's been a step by step, day by day, week by week process to get through and we've all had to work closer together than ever before.***

**Missy, Greene County**

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*Remote learning has been a challenge. I teach Digital Media - I already use Google Classroom so when we went online-only, my classes were already set up and my students already knew how to login and turn in assignments. Many of my colleagues had to start from scratch.*

*The biggest challenge is internet access and device availability. All my students have some form of internet access but not all of them have high speed internet. This has made remote instruction extremely difficult. Some are accessing content with cell phones or Chromebooks provided to them from their home schools. With adequate internet access and a high-powered device my program could theoretically be taught 100% online if need be for a certain period of time, but there is no way that could happen without a substantial investment in rural broadband internet.*

***I'm overwhelmed. I feel like I'm always working bouncing back and forth between the needs of my own children and their education and my students. Days and time have lost all meaning, I work just as much on the weekends now and respond to students at all times of the day. Thankfully our administration has been very supportive during this time.***

**Lauren, Clearfield County**

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*I am completely in agreement with the necessity of distance learning at this time, but it is not working for me and my students. Our students are totally checked out. Students are coming to meetings and completing assignments, but they are not really communicating with us. Most of them turn their cameras off during the meetings. We have lost personal connections with students.*

*We need some training on how to keep these students engaged during class time. I think we need to think out of the box and start using different platforms focused on engagement*

*I feel frustrated, sad, and not effective. Even though I am working hard to create engaging activities, it feels like I am going through the motions and so are the students. **It's like I have set a beautiful table with fine linens, the family china, and good silver. I put some fast food on the plates and the students sit down and pretend to eat it.***

**Rebecca, Cumberland County**

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*I have found it a challenge to teach in the virtual platform. I have always availed myself to my students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. With this environment, that is even more the case. Here is an example of what I mean:*

*One of the 3 classes I teach is organic chemistry. I hold virtual meetings every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The students have been working on their most recent assignment: choosing reaction conditions necessary to be able to convert the substrate shown into that particular product. (We are discussing E1, E2, SN1, SN2 reactions). This assignment is due this morning. Last night at 9 pm I received an email from a student asking me to upload a video on successful strategies to help with the assignment. Using screencastify, I prepared a video and it wasn't until 10:30 that it finally uploaded (we live where cable internet is not available) allowing me to share the video.*

*My wife teaches French and she is on the computer preparing virtual lessons or evaluating student work, and I am not exaggerating, 14 hours a day. She is trying to prepare kids for the AP exam and doesn't want to let the kids down!*

*I think what many have found out through this process is that for kids serious about learning the content, this is not a substitute for actual in class instruction. We are all putting in the extra time to give the kids the quality education that they all deserve, but virtual learning is not as effective as in-class instruction.*

**Tom, Westmoreland County**

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*These last few months have been very challenging to say the least. Teaching remotely isn't easy and I truly miss my students. It's not only difficult for educators, but for our students and parents as well. **One of the biggest challenges I face in rural Pennsylvania is the lack of devices and internet for many of our families.** Even though our district did lend out devices to families that needed them, they are also dealing with internet issues. Some of our families live in locations that just simply don't offer internet services.*

*There's also the challenge of families that do have the resources, but not the time. Many people are essential workers and when they get home at night don't have the time to take care of their families and work with their children on their assignments. Therefore, some of our students aren't learning the new content we are currently teaching through distance learning and aren't able to complete assignments. As an elementary educator I know this is a challenge for many of our families with young children. It's difficult for these families to juggle working, teaching, and taking care of their families.*

*I truly miss my students and they miss me. **We need that human interaction and I really hope we can get back to school in the fall where we can teach our students in person and everyone is on a level playing field. Distance learning has definitely shown the inequities that lie in public education.***

**Casey, Potter County**

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*Internet issues need to be addressed especially in our rural areas. Rural Internet (DSL in my case) will not support a zoom meeting between me and four students. It breaks, times out, or simply will not connect.*

*In my own home, I have a Penn State student and a high school student doing remote learning and me teaching remotely. To accommodate all of us I've had to borrow my brother's hot spot until it reached its limit and have had my brother add another hotspot on his cellular plan (he has unlimited - I do not). I added a tablet for another hotspot to my personal cellular account ...just to keep us all connected but even at that we ran out of cellular data halfway through the month (even on the unlimited lines because technically they SLOW down at 15 GB. The cellular companies did give 15 extra GB, but we blew through that halfway through the month of April. I ended up enabling the data in my vehicle just to finish for April. Penn State finally sent my daughter a hot spot also.*

*The district I live in communicated with my child a lot about continuity of education plans and why it was so important to continue and work through them. The district where I teach, though - I'm not sure why but the students got the "I don't have to do work" mentality hard and fast and it's been somewhat challenging getting them to understand that work is now in fact due.*

*All but three of my students (90+) students have Internet and about 85% have engaged in my LMS (Learning Management System) where my class is housed. However, during the first week of mandatory learning I only had about 60% participation in the submission of my assignments.*

*For the most part, I think the directives coming from the state to administrators to Principals and downward has been good. It is a very fluid situation and we all did and are doing the best we can.*

**Gail, Crawford County**

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*Remote/distance learning is working okay – but as an elementary teacher, we didn't have a true "platform" to utilize and the learning curve continues to be daunting (for students and parents especially). Some students have what they need, but many are hanging on with both parents also trying to work professionally from home—its exceptionally trying for many.*

*Having families reach out and let me know how they're doing helps - I can adjust expectations, supports, and assignments accordingly. It is also more helpful now that district administration is learning to temper their expectations to be reasonable. **As a classroom teacher, I am shouldering the burden as the main support (including technical support and primary contact) for families of my students.***

**Bob, Bucks County**

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*As a 5th grade science/social studies teacher, I only have two concerns currently with remote learning. **One is the lack of technology for our students and no internet available for them and me.** I operate off a hotspot and I live behind a Five-star resort, less than a half mile away.*

*Second, I'm always concerned that I am offering the same learning activities to internet students as well as those students who are working from textbooks. **My anxiety over remote learning has significantly been reduced by support from our district, IU, technology personnel and fellow teachers.***

**Lisa, Mercer County**

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*So, these last few months have been exhausting. **As one of my coworkers wisely pointed out, we are going through the 5 stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) but circling back to the beginning on an almost weekly basis.***

*Remote/distance learning has been an odd endeavor. I never really know what my students are thinking or feeling. Some have adapted very well. They stay on schedule, complete assignments, and show evidence of learning. Some are making the effort but are clearly distracted and juggling a lot of stuff. And some, unfortunately, are almost completely "off the grid" - at least as it relates to completing schoolwork. They sign into school each day for attendance, but they aren't doing much beyond that.*

*I'm one of the fortunate ones. **Our administration has been OUTSTANDING in their support, their continued recognition of the challenges of our students AND teachers and have worked hard to tell us we are doing a great job.** We had enough Chromebooks in our building to issue them to students. They can get help from IT on Tech Tuesdays, including turning in a Chromebook with a problem and getting another. So, from a resource standpoint, we are in a very good place.*

***That being said, we are using a lot of band-aids to cover a gaping wound.** If anyone thinks we are legitimately covering anything close to the originally planned curriculum, that is not happening. Yes, technology is great, but it doesn't replace what we do when we are in a classroom. I teach chemistry which is like teaching math. Students have to "do" it to get it. It's really tough to assess if they are actually learning or just doing a great job of accessing all that Google has to offer. Extra help sessions are via an interactive Google doc so I can try and mimic what I would do in class - ask questions to see where the student is, have them respond, ask another question, etc., while offering examples and other info.*

*Also, not really knowing each students' home situation, and knowing that many are working (I had a student start a new job with Amazon on May 1), we are keeping the "workload" and expectations below anything we would normally do.*

***We've done a pretty good job of designing, building and flying the plane at the same time, but we worry it's not enough. We worry about our students. We worry about getting sued. We worry about what school will look like when we finally return. We worry about our families. We worry about our graduating seniors. We worry about everyone's health. We worry about how we will survive the financial shortcomings that are projected.***

*We look forward to some semblance of a return to normalcy.*

**Theresa, Bucks County**

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*I think that under the unique circumstances that we are in now, distance learning is working; however, it has several drawbacks. **Nothing can replace the face-to-face interaction of a regular classroom setting.** Distance learning is not nearly as effective!*

*I think that our students are given the necessary resources for distance learning, as each family is provided with a device. I think that English Learners and support students are struggling with distance learning, as they are not able to receive the proper supports that they need. **Our administration has been very supportive of this transition and they understand the needs of the teachers, students and families living in our district.***

**Amy, Lancaster County**

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*I am making distance learning work for me, but it is very difficult. We are doing the best we can using Google Classroom and email. Assisting students with Mental Health and or Drug and Alcohol treatment needs has been difficult. **Our local treatment partners in these areas have been a tremendous help.** For the most part we have what we need. I feel pretty good overall but certainly less effective. We have done a great deal to make sure students have what they need.*

**Drew, Blair County**

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*I do feel inadequate and unfulfilled. I miss the kids, my colleagues, the buzz that is the High School. The majority of my students are staying engaged amidst the challenges we all are facing and for that I find some solace. I received this note late last night from a quiet young lady in one of my classes. She was just coming into her own, becoming more confident, and raising her hand. I cried... but as I close out my teaching career, I am able to go - being blessed to find it hard to leave a job I love - but it is time...*

***“I saw that it is Teacher Appreciation Week and especially with what has been going on in the world I just want you to know how much you're appreciated. You're so much more than ‘just’ a teacher. You're my mentor and friend, and I'll take your lessons with me wherever I go. Thank you for believing in me. You showed me how capable I am of achieving great things — and I'll always be grateful to have had you for a teacher.***

***Thank you for loving each and every one of your students. Thank you for pushing me to be the best student and version of myself I could be. Thank you for being upfront and honest. Thank you for keeping my spirits up when I needed it the most. Thank you for every late night you spent working and every early morning you spent preparing for a lesson. Thank you for not only shaping my future, but many others' futures as well. Thank you for guiding us in the right direction, for being there when it was needed, and most importantly, thank you for***

*deciding to be a teacher. I am grateful that I was able to be your student! I miss you very much and wish we were still in school!”*

**Susan, Bucks County**

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*Education of our children is being severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Although, I honestly think the educators are working even harder now to try to engage their students. The inequities in education funding across the nation, across states, and yes, even within individual counties is now in the spotlight. Special needs students surely are not getting all they need, but since the federal government has never fully funded the IDEA, this pandemic only exacerbates what was already a problem. **How education is being delivered right now depends on internet access, technology resources, funds to support teacher professional development and so many other resources, which vary from place to place. Once again, the zip code where you live is the determining factor of what kind of education your child will have access to during the pandemic. This will have long-lasting effects – academically, socially, and emotionally....***

*I also want to speak to the important role ESPs play in the education process. We are an integral part of educating the whole child, and unfortunately are impacted first and the hardest of all educators if cuts are made.... While school has been closed I, for example, have been not only doing secretarial work from home, I have also been making videos of myself reading books as a “Mystery Reader” for my students. I recently received an email from one of our reading specialists who shared one of my videos with her first-grade students. She shared screen shots of their comments. The most exciting news was that for one of the students it was the first bit of work she has submitted since schools shut down. She apparently really enjoyed the story and it made me feel really good. The child is being raised by her grandparents because her own parents are drug addicted. These are the students I worry about the most. They are already behind the eight ball, and they have so many needs. This crisis is only going to increase their need when we get back. We need more social workers, psychologists and counselors in our public schools to address trauma-based need. The pandemic is one more trauma these children will endure.*

*Many other ESPs in our District are on the front lines delivering free breakfasts and lunches throughout our community. The need here is great. Some are writing personal notes to students to encourage them. Others are making videos depicting a secret talent they can share with the students, saying the Pledge of Allegiance or making announcements. The creativity has been amazing – anything to keep the kids logging in and engaged!*

**Denise, Delaware County**

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*Teaching during the pandemic has been a roller coaster of emotions. The last marking period with seniors is one of the great rewards of teaching and that has been lost. I’ve kept up with students in weekly video chats for each class to talk about the week’s material, events in the news or just daily struggles—but nothing replaces the daily contact in the run up to graduation. **Further, worrying about that student who has not logged in or responded to emails is a constant background stress—is it a lack of WiFi? Apathy? Something more serious?***

*Moving the curriculum forward has been a challenge, but with great rewards. As a 20+ year veteran, I'm very comfortable with the material, but during this time I have learned online techniques I had been familiar with, but hadn't mastered—Flipgrid to have students leave video responses and to respond to each other, NearPod to integrate video, multiple choice, matching, short answer and brainstorming activities all in one place, and YouTube playlists to give students a curated series of videos on a variety of topics like if Kant and Hume was correct about the foundations of ethics or if we should keep or abolish the Electoral College. And though I've recorded myself on video before, I am now officially almost over the sound of my own voice on tape, as I've made tens of screencasts both for students to explain information and for fellow teachers on how to use technologies that were required on the fly.*

*Lastly the stress facing students has inspired me to give them more ways to demonstrate their learning. I've been richly rewarded: songs, tik-tok videos, artwork, and poems (in addition to formal papers) all of which have demonstrated understanding of complex ideas from presidential power to different forms of ethical relativism.*

**Adam, Chester County**

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***As a one-to-one student aide, my work has changed quite a bit, but I'm still doing everything in my power to support my student. Many of my coworkers are too. We are certainly available to support our teachers and have helped the District when called upon. We have helped pull students' belongings together, helped on ZOOM! Meetings and, when asked by teachers, talked with our students to encourage them to complete assignments. One-to-one aides work with students with disabilities and often times have been alongside one child for many years as they move through the school system. We are the constant for many students—in my district and across the state. As a support staff professional, I Facetime every day with my student, usually more than once. We have a connection that spans many years from elementary to middle school and now to High School next year. While the work of support staff has changed quite a bit since the outbreak, one thing remains the same, we are a constant source of stability for our students.***

**Patty, Delaware County**

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*The effects of the COVID 19 pandemic will be far reaching and long lasting in my district, which has over 4,300 student and is already 100% Title I. When the shutdown of schools began, the district immediately asked for teacher volunteers to assist in preparing free lunches for daily distribution. Without hesitation, our teachers stepped up on behalf of our families and students. **Pick up of hundreds of meals a week continues today.***

*Teachers were initially tasked with providing educational assignments for students to complete. As students were not yet online, teachers prepared multiple packets of work that could be copied and handed to families during the food distribution process. Many families picked up work and many didn't. Concerns about those isolated students grew and teachers are anxious and frustrated that our students didn't have the means to learn that so many of the surrounding districts enjoyed.*

*The district distributed all available computers to our families, but many of our students are still not connected. Our teachers began developing online curriculum with the help of our Intermediate Unit. Our families still face the lack of devices, lack of internet service, and having to share one device among multiple students in the household. Through it all, our educators continued the process of reaching out and connecting with our students in any way possible.*

*Our teachers do our best to service our population, including our special education students, our English language learners, and our high school Advanced Placement students. It is our sincere hope that lawmakers in Pennsylvania will recognize the deep and profound need our district faces in trying to educate our students. **We were a district severely lacking in resources before the shutdown, but our students deserve the same educational opportunities as the wealthiest districts in the state, and they are not getting them.***

**Kathy, Delaware County**

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