

Distance Learning in the Trumbull Public Schools: Questions & Answers

with Jonathan Budd, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent, and Christina Hefele, Director of Digital Learning
May 5, 2020

The following is pertinent information to help educate the community of the plans of Trumbull Public Schools. It is a paraphrase of the question & answer period of the May 5, 2020 Distance Learning in the Trumbull Public Schools presentation by Jonathan Budd, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent, and Christina Hefele, Director of Digital Learning. The full presentation may be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5PJ37ghW-o&feature=youtu.be>.

Before we talk about video in distance learning, Christina, what will this week's Parent Newsletter cover?

This week will be the sixth edition and will come out tomorrow. We will talk about a variety of different topics throughout the different grade levels. Discussions will include using the Read&Write tools and the WeVideo product, and tips on the secondary level for parents on how to support your child or make sure that your child can participate in live video if their teacher chooses. We've also highlighted additional tools that help support students in navigating Distance Learning from home.

Jonathan, Can you review how we are handling report cards and grading?

We have a broadcast from a couple of weeks ago where I was joined by Bryan Rickert, our Hillcrest Middle School Principal, and Marc Guarino, our Trumbull High School Principal, to talk in great detail about our changes to our report cards and assessments for the last part of this school year. If you want the details on this, please go to our website, www.trumbullps.org, look under our "2020 Distance Learning" tab, and find this particular link under our "Community TV Broadcasts." We've modified all of our report cards and report card systems, Pre-K through Grade 12, to reflect the differences in distance learning.

How will paraprofessionals be used in this Phase 2 of Distance Learning?

In general, we have three main types of paraprofessionals in Trumbull Public Schools: Kindergarten paraprofessionals (one for every Kindergarten classroom), Reading paraprofessionals (one for every elementary school), and PPS paraprofessionals (Pre-K through the ELITE post-high-school program).

Our Kindergarten and Reading paraprofessionals are supporting the school-based teams through a variety of activities that involve them reaching out to students in different ways. With our PPS paraprofessionals, school-based teams and principals are integrating them as appropriate. I'd encourage parents with questions about this to contact their school's principal or school-based team for more details. Our paraprofessionals, like the rest of our staff, are very important to us and valued for their expertise and their work with kids, and we are pleased that Phase 2 can bring them into the process.

That brings us to the main focus today, which is the use of video during Phase 2 of distance learning. I think I should preface this by saying that distance learning cannot replicate or even come close to the richness of an actual classroom, teaming with kids with an educator right there in front of you. However, we can do some things during distance learning that might allow for additional enhancements through video. We are going to talk about video today in two phases. The first is recorded video and the second is live video.

Why might a teacher choose to do some recorded video for Distance Learning?

Recorded videos often work best when teachers want to instruct students on a concept. The recorded video avenue gives students the opportunity of repetition (through rewinding), reflection (through pausing), and getting the concepts at their own pace.

Are there any other examples you could give of recorded video's use from the PreK-Grade 12 spectrum?

I think we have great examples over the last few weeks. At the PreK-5 grade levels, you will often find teachers reading a text or story to their students, giving a connection to the student on how to read through modeling

reading practices. At the secondary level, we often find teachers using it to teach a concept. It is nice for the students to see their own teacher teaching concepts before the students are able to do the work on their own.

All that that sounds fantastic, but we also know that live video could also have some advantages. Could you talk about why a teacher might be interested in live video?

We have been working with a variety of different teachers to talk with them on how they would use live video as we begin to roll this out in the district. A lot of teachers would use it during office hours, or in small groups to work through a particular concept. We also have specialists, for example in reading and math, who will be doing intervention with students one-on-one in those types of environments, as well as the special education providers who will also be delivering those services one-on-one. We find that the one-on-one really facilitates the relationship between the teachers and students and is tremendously valuable for social and emotional learning. Kids just need time to connect with their teachers and to see the kids from their class, whether it is in a small group or larger group. Teachers are using live video to bring those relationships together in meaningful ways.

Any other examples of live video Pre-K-12 as it is starting to evolve for us?

I think we will also see some of our secondary teachers using it to also teach a concept and give a mini-lesson to the students before they engage in particular activities. Building those relationships and bringing those classrooms together are part of trying to make sure all are connected even in this sort of virtual world we are in right now.

Jonathan, can you tell us a little bit about the consent forms that will be going out regarding live video?

Any teacher who is going to be participating in live video for distance learning will be providing a district-issued consent form to parents of students who may be participating. Any parent who wishes the live video to occur will need to e-mail back the teacher that that is acceptable. The consent form has been developed with our legal counsel and basically assures that we have parents whose children participate in live video knowledgeable about the confidentiality that's required to protect each student participating, the student in your home and possibly the children in other homes, as well as the confidentiality of the teacher. The parent will just e-mail back; the parent doesn't need to sign, but the e-mail back is the consent that the parent affirms that consent form. A parent or student does not have to agree to participate in live video. If a parent or student reads the consent form and doesn't want to agree to it, that's fine. Live video activities are important to the learning, but they are not essential. So a student who doesn't want to participate, won't be penalized in any way. If a parent has questions about the particulars of that consent form, the parent can reach out to the school's principal or to my office.

Are there any other student guidelines for live video?

What we have learned, with other districts, is the importance of helping students really focus on the live video for distance learning. My advice for parents or guardians who are going to have their children participate is that you want your child to focus in a quiet, well-lit environment with minimal distractions. The consent form will include that no one else in the family, including the parents, should be participating in the learning, just the student, like if we were in the actual school setting. The student is also expected to follow all general school rules, so the student should be dressed as if the student were attending school, and the student should have his or her materials there. We, especially at the K-5 level, know that much of the live video may be focused, as you say appropriately, on the social aspect of interacting with your teacher and a few other kids, as well as emotional connections. There may not be academic content covered in the live video, particularly to start. However, we still suggest that strong attention to the actual experience is important so that the student understands it is an extension of school in the home environment.

Will teachers be recording these videos, in case my student can't join at the time given?

Recording of the videos by the teacher or by the parent is not permitted based on the consent form and various provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. It's a live experience, but there is no record that can be maintained of it.

Christina, what training have we been providing for our over 600 teachers in the Trumbull Public Schools?

Yesterday we started with our secondary folks, in middle school and high school, and offered a variety of optional training sessions. For the remainder of this week, our technology integrators will be providing technical training for teachers on how to use Google Meet and integrate it in Google Classroom as well as manage those meetings online. After we are done with the secondary folks, we will be providing the same types of optional training for elementary level teachers. The tech integrators will also be available for follow-up questions outside of the training.

Jonathan: One important thing that you had mentioned that I want to add to is that the best aspects of our professional workshops during this time are that they are developed and led by Trumbull Public Schools teachers and responsive to the curriculum in Trumbull Public Schools. We have our technology integration specialists joined for the Elementary PD led by some very interested elementary teachers who have stepped up to the plate to lead workshops for their colleagues. We have found over the years this kind of approach really supports our teachers as well as those teachers who want to lead their peers to higher learning.

Is live video participation optional for teachers?

It is optional for our teachers to participate in recorded and live video, the same way that participation in live video is optional for students and families. Mandated recorded and live video would not allow all of our teachers to participate at the high level they are participating in currently.