

PTA Communication Conference

Fall 2020

Topics are as follows:

1. Social/Emotional Health of our children
2. Grading/Testing/Assessment

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Elementary

What is being done in the schools to encourage social emotional health, for both virtual and in-classroom instruction? Also are the students' social/emotional needs being addressed this year aside from Sanford Harmony?

With strategic staff alignment, the elementary schools now have a social worker and school counselor assigned to work with the building team in providing social-emotional learning (SEL) support to students. The support is aligned with the Sanford Harmony program and seeks to enhance the opportunities for students to practice the skills learned in the program. Additionally, each school provides appropriate SEL skill groups for students. For more information, parents are encouraged to contact their building principal or psychologist.

In addition, the District participates in the Nassau BOCES Mental Health Consortium which meets regularly to review and to discuss issues, practices, and research-based interventions to address mental health needs in schools. The consortium works with the National Center for School Mental Health which gives the District access to the following (SHAPE Program):

- free, targeted resources to help advance school mental health quality and sustainability.
- a data-driven mental health team process for the District.

Moreover, the District has established a collaborative relationship with Central Nassau Guidance (CNG), a community-based mental health center. Mental health staff from CNG work collaboratively with District staff to address the SEL needs of students, families, and staff.

Will there be attempts to join the virtual students with the in-person students in their home school?

Students learning in both environments have connected in a variety of ways. Some specific examples of collaborations between virtual and in-person students are outlined below:

Baylis

- Two full school assembly programs where virtual students participated with in house students.
- Read alouds for each class, inclusive of the virtual students.
- Further opportunities are being explored, such as weekly grade level read alouds, reading partnership classes and parties.

Berry Hill

- Check-ins from the principal to virtual classes, sharing writing celebrations and shared staff development opportunities.
- We are looking forward to sharing assemblies and other Cultural Arts Programs.

Robbins Lane

- We have partnered with our virtual classes on Halloween to create a video of all students that was shared on the website.
- In 5th grade, the virtual class joined the in-person classes for an interview and Q & A with TV journalist Melanie Woodrow.
- The PRIDE and Character Education committees are working on some ideas which include sharing a book of the month at a grade level "assembly" and setting up in-person - virtual pen pal partnerships that would involve written correspondence as well as, face to face virtual meetings.

South Grove

- School-wide assemblies (grade level workshops with external guests) which happen about twice a month.
- SEL lessons where classes join together for conversation/games.
- Reading/writing celebrations.
- Parties & celebrations (e.g. Halloween- where classes mixed up their classes throughout the day to do different themed activities).

Village

- On Halloween, virtual students were able to watch the parade and send in photos of themselves in costumes for the web site.
- All children are invited to PTA events, such as Halloween Bingo Night.
- Some classes on the same grade level have done and/or are planning to do SEL lessons that combine the virtual children with the in-house children.
- Book buddies, which are done across two grades, combine the virtual class with an in-house one rather than two virtual classes together.

Walt Whitman

- Third grade has been meeting with the virtual classes to engage in presentations related to PBL (Project Based Learning) projects in which parents led discussions with students in their field of expertise such as engineering.
- Author Visit: WW and APW participated in a PTA-Arts in Ed. presentation hosted by the Klise sisters in which virtual students engaged with in-school students.
- Virtual students send in pictures for events such as Kindness in Chalk and Halloween.

Willits

- At AP Willits, we have been connecting with our Virtual Students through our Project based learning activities, school-wide assemblies and Unity Day celebrations.
- As part of the launch of the Grade 2 PBL project, we had a team of in person teachers join the Grade 2 virtual class and run small group brainstorm sessions.
- Our Unity celebrations have been streamed into the virtual classes and at our Halloween celebration/Unity Day.
- For Halloween, the students joined us live via Google Meet to show off their costumes.

Is the District monitoring/considering how the changes due to the pandemic has affected the students?

This is one of our guiding principles this year. Teachers, support staff, building administrators and coordinators are working closely to determine to what extent "COVID-slide" has impacted each and every student. Through frequent and data-informed MTSS meetings, progress monitoring, and data collecting assessments such as Achieve 3000, Aimsweb, and the NWEA testing, teachers are using comparative historical data and the ongoing monitoring of students, as well as differentiating and providing target specific interventions and academic supports, in order to close any learning and achievement gaps as well as to keep students moving forward in their learning targets and academic goals. The Branching Minds software data repository is used to track and formulate academic and social/emotional interventions. This helps create a running record of interventions used to implement and adjust MTSS interventions and accommodations. Schools also conduct weekly MTSS and Case Conference meetings to review all pertinent information about students and to identify any changes in academic as well as SEL performance.

Middle School

Children miss getting together for lunch, working close together in groups, socializing, etc. What can we do in school to help foster more social connections? How can we help children deal with the ongoing need for social distance and wearing masks and "missing out" on fun times when they see other friends/children/adults socializing without following these protocols (out of the school environment)?

Middle school students continue to have opportunities to socialize during sign-up recess and in their assigned Lunch and Learn settings. Middle school clubs provide an opportunity for students to make connections with one another. All in-school clubs also have a virtual component to include those students learning from home.

Counselors and social workers provide group SEL opportunities for students during advisory and lunch times. Health classes provide students with information and opportunities to discuss stress, coping strategies, and social skills/connection. Emphasis is placed on understanding that the protocols in place are keeping students safe and in school, and socialization without those protocols should be viewed as a risk.

How can the middle schools improve virtual physical education and virtual band classes? Both classes help for the emotional health of our children.

The Music Industry is trying to solve a problem called "latency." Latency is the delay that occurs when data is transferred over the internet. Since music happens in real time, the delay makes it impossible for musicians to play together via the internet. We have designed some solutions and alternatives for our performing ensembles. These include performing in smaller classes and having virtual students play along with their microphones turned off. We have also invested in SmartMusic software which makes practicing interactive and fun.

The goal for virtual Physical Education is to engage each student and encourage them to maximize their personal growth. The needs and goals for Grades K-12 differ and therefore require varied approaches to ensure safety as well as curricular needs. We have focused on enhancing the social emotional needs of our students and at times will forego activity-based lessons in exchange for dialogue and sharing of viewpoints and emotions.

Elementary teachers are focusing on rudimentary movement activities along with fun games that kids can play safely in the home and offer a positive outcome without stress. Co-pilots may teach the virtual lessons while the classroom teacher goes outside or engages the in-person students. We have had a great deal of success with this model which keeps all students actively engaged in the daily lessons. Additionally,

we have virtual teachers at the middle schools who focus on delivering high quality lessons to the kids who are not physically in school.

High School

Can SHS start a mandatory mental health class where students will learn about depression, anxiety, eating disorders and other mental issues as well as coping skills and ways to help? Or is there a way to have a special one week lunch time program that kids can attend?

A 10-week wellness unit is presented in Physical Education classes to promote physical and mental health. For students identified as needing targeted support in stress management, executive functioning, and other areas of mental health, skill-building and support groups are offered through the Guidance Department. Group and individual counseling are available to students demonstrating a need for significant mental health support.

Children miss working close together in groups, participating in team sports, going on class trips, socializing...some are missing out on milestone life events (prom, graduation, drivers ed with their friends). All-virtual students are missing out on establishing relationships with teachers as well as meeting potential new friends. What can we do in school to help foster more social connections? How can we help children deal with the ongoing need for social distance and wearing masks and "missing out" on fun times when they see other friends/children/adults socializing without following these protocols (out of the school environment)?

All students have the opportunity to attend clubs after school and school groups during the school day, including virtual students. High school clubs are listed on the school website. Students can email the advisor and request the classroom code or Group Me information to join the virtual club meetings. Teachers are also allowing some time within the school day to build upon rapport and check in with students as they are mindful of the lack of social opportunities presented by the pandemic.

Some children have not been contacted by their guidance counselors yet. There are SAT /ACT tests etc to plan for. How often should a counselor be in contact with their assigned students?

The guidance counselors have been working with their students to review college testing procedures and processes. Each year the department has formal meetings with their students to review this process, along with their scheduling questions. Throughout the year, the department facilitates virtual evening workshops for parents

and students regarding standardized exams, the college application process, and our high school developmental school counseling program.

SEPTA

Have Guidance Counselors reached out or prioritized contacting Special Ed students to see how they are handling this hybrid learning instruction? This situation is especially difficult for these students who are forced to sit at a computer all day with incredible attention issues. Also, they are generally reluctant to reach out themselves so we need our counselors to be proactive.

Our students are supported by a network of professionals including the special education teachers, behavior analysis, social workers, psychologists, and counselors. Each is available to support students and families during these challenging times. Each of these professionals participate in the MTSS building team which reviews concerns relative to students' performance. Parents are encouraged to contact any of these professionals to discuss concerns with their child's adjustment/performance.

GRADING/ TESTING/ ASSESSMENT

Elementary

When the children take the standardized tests, parents are not given the results. Is there a way to give the parents access to the results?

Yes. The results of the NWEA MAP assessment (universal baseline assessment taken in Mid-October) have now been reviewed by the building administration, the academic coordinators, and the teaching staff. These assessment results are currently being formatted and prepared for posting on the parent portal with additional information related to understanding and interpreting the student's scores.

Has the State made any determination on whether or not ELA or math assessments will be done this year?

The ELA and Math tests in Grades 3-8 are federally mandated. The current administration indicated that they were unlikely to forego the exams next spring. It is unclear what the agenda of the incoming administration will be. If the federal government relaxes the mandate, the State Board of Regents would still have to decide whether to administer the exams.

Middle School/ High School

Will there be an assessment test for placement in Project Beyond this school year?

The CogAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) is a multiple-choice assessment that measures reasoning skills with different types of verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal questions. The CogAT is a group-administered aptitude test that contains three different types of questions that cover unique cognitive abilities. The CogAT has traditionally been used as a criterion for placement in Project Beyond for Grades 3,4, and 5.

Currently Grade 4 and 5 Project Beyond classes are up and running, and Grade 3 will begin after the CogAT administration at the mid-year point. Students currently in the program will remain in the program and do not have to take the CogAT again.

With the use of more open-book tests this year, how can we ensure that students are well-prepared for AP tests and NY State Regents exams (if those exams take place) as these exams are not open-book exams. And, how will the younger students be prepared for more rigor next year assuming we are able to return to "normal" test procedures?

Our programs/curriculum/instruction exceed the baseline Regents exam standards. Our teachers are well versed in the Regents content and manner of questioning. Student assignments and assessments often include and mirror the formatting, questioning, structure, and style of the Regents exams. Regents and AP items are embedded in instruction and assignments. Digital applications and subscriptions, Study Island, Castle Learning, Go Math, IXL, and ST Math for example, are repositories of previous NYS and Regents Assessment questions in all content areas. Students are able to access these applications for course-based assignments as well as independent Regents study, review, and preparation. Courses are incorporating increased document and text analysis rooted in NYS Regents and AP skills and standards.

Course and class rigor have not diminished during this time. One of the benefits resulting from the need to create smaller in-person class sizes to address social distancing, is the increase in 1:1 time and conferencing between students, teachers, and support staff. Teachers are able to differentiate their instruction to an even greater and more individualized degree for the students. Traditional assessment, running records, and instructional practices are still taking place, and are now further enhanced with more conversation, discussion, and reflective analysis to guarantee appropriate rigor, opportunity for enrichment, and increased depth and understanding of the content. The NWEA for our students is an adaptive assessment that allows us to target specific areas for instructional focus to strengthen areas of concern and to highlight areas of strength.

Assessment data is triangulated to ensure integrity, validity, and to provide an accurate measure of student performance and mastery of the material. (i.e., Growth-over-time trends, reflective of the overall picture, quantitative assessment data on par with student participation, conversations, interaction, ability to verbally respond to questions, and engage in class discussion.)

How are middle schools and the high school addressing fairness in general testing with regard to the advantage the all virtual students or the hybrid or “quarantined until you get your COVID test in order to come back to school” students have over the in-person students? Such as access to additional resources like notes, group chats, additional devices and search availability etc? Honor system is expected but we know that is not necessarily happening.

The students who are fully virtual take all their tests from home. To be fair to virtual and in-person students can we institute a system where all students take their exams from home virtually? We realize teachers may have to make two versions of an exam but it would level the playing field to have all students tested in the same manner.

Some teachers at Syosset High School are timing exams which can create a lot of anxiety for some students and contribute to poor performance. First, why are only some SHS teachers timing exams? Doesn't this create an unfair advantage to the students that aren't timed? Most teachers when asked about the timed exams say it is the only way to try and curb cheating with half class in person and half remote. Isn't there another way to ensure students aren't cheating?

Are virtual students and in-person students tested at the same level and standards?

Standards-based and leveled assessments and evaluations are a consistent factor for all student assessments, regardless of in-person or virtual status. What does intentionally vary in this new era of assessment are the varieties, the choices, the flexibility, the differentiation, the level of self-reflection, the opportunity for portfolio evaluation, case studies, collaborative work, project-based learning, integrated performance assessments, essays, cultural comparisons, simulated conversations, socratic seminar discussions, and presentations. All offer more of a focus on performance-based assessments, which offer increased opportunities for success as compared to traditional multiple choice “tests” that restrict opportunities and offer only a single modality for measuring success and growth.

Google Meets offer additional opportunities to create small instructional groups that serve as a forum for deepening meaningful and in-depth conversations, enhancing student written responses, reflections, projects and essays responses.

Most teachers are using Go Guardian to monitor virtual and in-person students while the students are working independently, in small groups, and during assessments in the virtual platform. Google Forms and Canvas also have features for "supervision" during assessments. Where appropriate, time constraints are placed on assessments (that are also in accordance with any testing accommodations a student might have) to limit the amount of time and to maintain focus on the taking of the test. For students with testing accommodations, teachers arrange for tests to be administered in the testing room. The testing office logs the time in/time out. Students return to the testing room during lunch or support class to use the remainder of their extended time, where applicable. Each student may have specific arrangements. For example, if the student has tests read, they have a "virtual testing room" link and a proctor is assigned to implement the accommodations.

Tests may be administered via one of the many new platforms that the District has invested in this year (Go Guardian, Canvas, Google Forms, Nearpod, etc.). If the teachers choose to use an on-line platform, there are timer features for the start time of the test and the end time. The option and discretion for use of the timer is one the teacher makes based upon the applicability to the material being assessed and the nature of the assessment. Student engagement during testing is always monitored by teachers/proctors and students are always expected to do their own work.

Most assessments are given to the in-person and virtual students on the same day, and teachers do their best to alternate the A/B rotation of who is in-person and who is virtual on assessment days. When appropriate, tests are take-home (all virtual); and/or open notes/open book.

This school year, additional emphasis is placed on student engagement in class and ability to be active learners both in-person and remotely.

These changes, adaptations, modifications, and new manners of assessment resemble potential adjustments to both AP & NYS Regents Exams (based on 2020 AP Exams).

The goal is always to challenge each student to do their very best. Effort, attitude and participation are the most important indicators in the process of authentic assessment that measures progress and growth, as well as a student's proficiency and perseverance as they relate to each student's personal benchmark and goals.

Why is it that SUPA classes do not count the same as an AP or Honors class in that those two get an extra .5 bonus added to GPA but a SUPA class does not even though it is just as rigorous?

Syosset offers numerous courses from various local colleges such as LIU Post, SUNY Farmingdale and Syracuse University. The only courses that carry the bonus point are Advanced Placement and Honors courses because they are recognized as the national standard.

Currently we are being charged \$99 for each AP exam when the College Board charges \$95, \$27 for the PSAT when the College Board charges \$17? Where is the extra money being used?

The extra money covers the cost of the registration program used for online payment.

SEPTA

How does the timing of exams affect the students with IEPs/504s that get extra time? Are these students still getting this important accommodation? How has testing in the new hybrid model affected these accommodations?

Students with testing accommodation continue to have access to all accommodations listed on their IEP/504 plan. In-person students attend the testing room; virtual students receive a testing room log-in. Parents are encouraged to contact their child's special education teacher of record with questions relative to the delivery of testing accommodations listed on the IEP; the student's guidance counselor should be contacted for 504 plan questions.