

COVID-19

Tips, Tricks, and Resources from School Social Workers

Link to Webinar: <https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/3f0f5838-005a-46ed-af6d-d5c845eb5b65>

Panel Members

Moderator: Lynne Penke, Youth Education Team- Connect staff in Hennepin County with school partners and those that work with our students in the community to engage students in county services and ensure educational outcomes.

Barb Mersey, Robbinsdale Area Schools: School Social Worker Robbinsdale Cooper High School for 18 years and in the Robbinsdale District for 30 years.

Cassie Zonnefeld, Minneapolis Public Schools: Social worker at Justice Page Middle School

Cathy Dalnes, Minneapolis Public Schools: Manager of Social Work Services.

Katie Kaminski, Robbinsdale Areas Schools: School Social Worker at Sandburg Middle School. Smallest middle school in the district. Experience with Community Corrections and outpatient mental health

Jeff Stephani, Intermediate District 287: School Social Worker at West Education Center in District 287. Works in setting IV and all students are special education. History and experience with therapy and child protection.

Vickie Goulette, Hennepin County Parent Support Outreach Program: Parent Support Out Reach Program that services families that have at least one child that is 10 or younger in the home.

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General Support

Q: What questions are you answering throughout your day?

A: Questions around distance learning has been phased. When we started in March most questions were about connectivity and access to learning options such as devices or paper curriculum as well as how to connect with kids virtually. Social Workers continue to work with school administrators to connect with the families on these needs and help identify who still needs physical resources and who may be having other issues with accessing learning.

We then moved to a phase that focused on attendance and engagement. This includes learning how to assess attendance what engagement looks like has been evolving. This also has looked different for different kids depending on their needs and the needs in the home.

Now we are in a phase of coping- coping with the extended distance learning, with the shelter in place order, and being cooped up in the home. Students and parents are both struggling and reaching out for support to deal with things at home.

Each school may be experiencing these phases differently and they may be overlapping and/or continuing.

Technology and General Resources

Q: What platforms or apps have been most useful or accessible to connect with students?

A: Google Voice does require using personal google accounts, but it is easiest and more likely to have families respond, unlike Google Meets that routes the call to appear to be coming from out of state. Google Voice also allows to mark as Do Not Disturb so that teachers can block the calls when needed and direct calls elsewhere. There is also the option to receive call backs on Google Voice and there is voicemail available too. This has been the most useful and popular option.

Additionally, Zoom and Google Meets as well as Google Hangouts are recommended.

Q: What is the best resource or tool that you have discovered since COVID?

A: Anne Gearity has recently done a webinar through HCMAH on how to talk to kids through COVID, how to parent through stress and more:

<https://macmh.org/publications/covid-19-resources/>

Google Voice has been a great way to connect with kids.

For teachers there is a free resource that helps with stress called Head Space:

<https://www.headspace.com/educators>

Identify ways to relax and be mindful of what students need. That is one resource you have at your disposal and could make a huge difference.

Collaboration continues to be the best thing available to everyone. Reach out to your partners and ask for what you need. We are all in this together.

Engaging Students

Q: How have you been connecting and engaging with kids that are not accessing distance learning?

A: Teachers will identify students they are concerned about and someone in the school will reach out to the student and family to identify the barrier to school- maybe it is a device or connectivity issue or issues at home. If there are students that are not access most or all their classes a school social worker will reach out.

Connecting with students may be done through any platform but many of the older students have cell phones and will respond to a text message.

Q: How do you engage with students that have left the area or state?

A: The first thing is to identify if there are barriers to their current location and follow through on what you would do if they were local. Some students may have limited access to devices or internet but can engage if offered a hot spot.

Q: What are the options if you can't reach the household members of a student?

A: If texting doesn't work try to send a post card with contact info to the last known address.

Another fun option is sending some fun mail to students- playing or Uno cards or Legos for example, anything that will catch their attention and encourage them to reach out.

Try reaching out to an emergency contact listed in the student records or if you are aware of a family member or close friend to the family you can reach them and ask for help connecting.

Q: How do I connect with students on Probation (or other county services)?

A: Reach out to the students Probation Officer directly. If you do not know who that is you may contact Pam Russ in Juvenile Probation at Pam.Russ@Hennepin.us or 612-596-1146

If you know a family or student is working with any of the county services you can reach out to their county worker for help. If you are not aware of who their worker is or if they have a county case worker you can reach out Linda Champlin, Education Coordinator and ESSA Point of Contact for Hennepin County- Linda.Champlin@Hennepin.us or 612-543-0590

Support for Students and Parents

Q: What can we do to help kids who are feeling cooped up?

A: Get creative! Trying just having fun with kids- text GIFs and memes with your students. Consider options to connect the students to each other- virtual lunches where they don't have to engage in schoolwork but can just hang out with each other- these can be done through Google Meet.

Art supplies sent to students can evolve into a virtual art show. Sending a deck of cards and playing card games through a virtual connection is a fun way to see and talk to kids.

Use Flip Grid to set up weekly themes such as show us your pet, what is your favorite food, etc.

Using creative ways to connect away from the pressure schoolwork and foster a continued connection with students and allow for you to engage with them and see if they are doing ok.

Q: What can we do when kids are feeling overwhelmed?

A: Remind the students and the parents that this should not be as long or structured as a typical in person school day. Students are not expected to be at their computers for 6 hours a day. Students should use the freedom this schedule has to offer to find times that work for them. There may be specific times that they have to meet with a teacher or complete a test but for the most part they can flex their time.

If a student is overwhelmed allow for them to walk away, take a walk, work on something else, tackle only a small piece of it.

Consider virtual calming rooms. Staff at Osseo ALC, Wayzata, and Robbinsdale can advise as they have set these up. These rooms include coloring pages, puzzles, calming music to listen to while studying.

Q. What supports should we consider for parents?

A: Parent Newsletters have been helpful to answer standard questions parents have. These could include resources for them to utilize while help their children with distance learning. This could also include advice if they are recognizing behaviors in the students that could impact their learning long term.

Use this to give parents tips and tricks! Remind them they can step away, their days can be flexible, give them permission to take breaks with their students.

Support for Students Experiencing Disparities

Q: How are schools addressing the disparities distance learning has on the populations of students that already face the great disparities (students of color, low income students, students with IEPs, English language learners, etc.)?

A: Implications of crises like COVID-19 have placed an even great spotlight on students with inequities. There continues to be concerns of a great achievement gap and the social/emotional health of the students.

School Social Workers are putting their greatest amount of resources into these populations by first identifying and responding to any barriers- this could be access to the learning or find new ways to get the learning to these students and talking directly to the families to understand what is needed.

Districts are seeing grades declining for special education students. These students are also harder to engage in the distance learning. Schools can assign case managers to these students to allow for extra staff to provide support to them. School leadership will need to address how to grade during distance learning; some districts have gone to Pass/Fail as one option to address the disparities.

Utilize district wide services and supports. This could be interpreters to speak with students and families to identify ways to build in supports for students.

Schools are recognizing that the greatest impact on these students will be seen when this is over. When students are back in school schools should consider how they will address the social and emotional health of the students. Academics will be difficult to work through until these other needs are addressed. This could be small groups with students to talk about things, be trauma focused, teach kids the skills on how to regulate and focus. Find ways to allow them to feel safe.

Q: How are schools supporting undocumented populations?

A: Utilize those in the schools that work most with these students and families; these could be cultural liaisons or other staff that work closing with these students while at schools.

Talk to the families directly to help identify what they are struggling with, what resources they need, what will work well for them.

Sending weekly videos to these families with topics specific to their needs can be helpful. If videos are not an option, consider text or flyers. Topics could be dealing with anxiety, health related, etc.

Identify resources for immigrants and share. Consider how the families are most likely to view the resources and share what is available. Offer to help connect them to resources they need.

Resource:

Videos shared by Cassie Zonnefeld at Justice Page Middle School in Minneapolis:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-Ph_2PdKdfpJq3VYEM1i8IzpiIGI0tWT/view

<https://www.loom.com/share/024e119c1b374d7da2e498a4b696f473>

Q: What financial resource is available for undocumented immigrants

A: For Latinos you can reach out to CLUES: <http://www.clues.org/>

Panelist Cassie Zonnefeld has offered to provide additional resources by request. Email her at cassie.zonnefeld@mpls.k12.mn.us

Support for Teachers

Q: What advice or ideas are available to teachers that are stepping out of their normal roles and providing more social work response to students?

A: First and foremost- we are all in this together. None of us feel prepared or have all the answers and that is ok.

Be genuine, if you don't have the answer, that is ok and it is ok to say that.

Teaching from home can feel isolating but remember we are all in this together. Remember to utilize the contacts you have and the partnerships available when in the school.

When talking with families start with human connection- ask how they are, how their families are, how the kids are, how they are doing at home with their kids, etc. Then begin the conversation about school or the task at hand. It is important and helpful to check in with the person before dealing with the school/work piece.

Request community agency referrals- the agencies are available and working, they are increasing capacity when they can and helping however, whenever, and wherever it is needed.

The greatest resources we have through all of this is COLLABORATION. Everyone is opening their services to each other and reaching out like never before. Teachers- YOU ARE DOING THIS! You are supporting kids; you are doing all you can for them and more. They feel this even if it is different.

County Services

Q. How can we make referrals to county services?

A: The same way you would have always done. Services continue to be available even if they are delivered differently. Utilize the same referral path you would usually.

Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP)

The Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP) is a voluntary child welfare program that operates completely out of domain of child protection. The parent needs to consent to participate and they create the case plan. Social workers are there to support the parent and connect them to resources but do not drive the case plan.

Help is available for housing, help with housing, food support, child development, child care, behavioral issues. Example of recent support include: helping a family with plumbing issues that could have caused a loss in housing, purchasing Chromebooks for distance learning, homes services to allow for living in the home safely, and more.

Referrals to PSOP and child protection have dipped- we are not reaching the families that are at the highest risk. We are doing outreach including cold calling families but are asking schools to send referrals for families you think may need extra support.

PSOP is keeping families open longer, are helping to process a lot of trauma, and want to help as many families as we can.

<https://www.hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/residents/human-services/docs/PSOP-flyer.pdf?la=en>

Be@School

be.at.school@hennepin.us

Phone: 612-348-6041

Schools can continue to report truancy through the standard referrals. There is a new referral called the COVID Referral- this report does not require the 3-day principal letter or the student to have any unexcused days. It is considered a child welfare referral to address what the family needs to support their student during distance learning and to get the student engaged in distance learning.

Communication with the families is softer and is looking to help and support the families to help engage the schools.

Be@School is able to utilize county systems to find phone numbers, addresses, and contacts that may not be known by schools. They also have community agencies and resources that can help support families.

Educational Neglect- Students 11 and younger

Contact: Valarie Graser

Truancy- 12 and older

Contact: Angie Hightower

Session Related Activities & Ice Breaker Questions

Notes: ideas for games/activities for distance learning meetings. I suggest checking out the links to gauge what kind of kid and what age each resource would be best for. Some of the games are great for little ones but boring for older kids. Some might be harder for young children, so do some exploring! You could get paid to have fun, why not! If anyone would like to add to the list, email hbrahim@hclib.org and I will update it.

Games/Ice Breakers

- Pictionary
 - Pictionary word generator <https://www.thegamegal.com/word-generator/>
 - You can share your screen and use Microsoft paint to draw
 - You can also use this website, it is more user friendly for children. You would share your screen with this one as well. <https://toytheater.com/doodle-pad/>
- Rock paper scissors (as usual, just virtual)
 - Keep score and the first to get to “x” points wins
- Math flash cards
 - First to “x” wins
 - <https://www.math-drills.com/flashcards.php>
- Spaceship
 - (alternative name to hangman, instead of a hangman you draw a spaceship, once the spaceship is completed the game is lost. Typically 6 chances are given before a loss)
- Category
 - a game where each player chooses a category (on their turn). The players then go around and name things in this category. The loser of the round is the person that runs out of words first. You can choose how many rounds to play, say 5. Suggestion: write down some categories ahead of time in case the student has trouble picking a category.
- 20 questions
- Top 3
 - Choose a category to name your top 3 in. For example, movies, shows, books, breakfast foods, clothing, best kinds of trees, best places to get fries, etc. Pick your top 3. They pick their top 3. Then you debate as to why your top 3 should be the top 3.
 - The point is to have a fun and light hearted debate. It helps kids learn reasoning skills and how to communicate their points. This is for those kids who love banter or debate naturally. Kids who don’t like debates will likely not be as excited about this one. In that case, choose another game.
- Hidden Picture Find
 - A game where the objective is to find hidden pictures
 - You can play online with this link <https://toytheater.com/word-find-2/>
 - With the online link you can play with the same picture and have a completion
 - OR you can download pictures from google, screen share, and do them together. You would download the picture (Hibaaq has a folder of them so she can just share them with whomever wants them). Then you open the picture with
- Drawize
 - A competitive game of drawing much like Pictionary. You are able to send an invite to play over email. They click on the link and the game begins. Its kid friendly. It does have ads so that is something to note. I only came across one add so not too bad.
 - It can be difficult to draw on the computer, much easier on a phone but I we don’t know if our kids have phones or not. If so you can try the mobile version.
 - Note: this game may be too difficult for early elementary kids. It will likely work better with kids grades 4-high school. Very young kids may not have some of the words in their vocabulary. But it is worth a try if the students want to play. They can have a parent/guardian play with them in that case.
 - Web link: <https://www.drawize.com/>
 - Click the “Play with friends on the top left-hand side. Then copy the link and send it to the student.

- YouTube
 - You can watch educational videos about something the student needs help in
 - Spend some time looking up videos for common school subjects like long division in math. There are some very good tutorials and problem solving videos uploaded by teachers/professors.
 - You can watch funny animal videos, or something similar for a break/fun activity
- Tangrams
 - an educational game in which you take various shapes and put them together to make a desired shape or design
 - online game: <https://toytheater.com/tangram/>
- Make Your Own Comics!
 - <https://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/>
 - This is an activity I find kids like. You can create a comic together with screen sharing. Or you can make your own, on your own, and share together in a following session. Kind of like homework, but more fun. It's a good activity for kids who like to tell stories.

Ice Breaker Questions

Get to know you ice breakers (good for initial session, you can both answer) These questions will aim at getting to know some interests of the child as well as how they like to play, which will be important when choosing games. You choose how many/which questions you

- What is your favorite subject in school?
- What is your favorite kind of game and why?
 - board game, outside, video games, in person games, online, etc.
- What are you good at/like to do, do you have a hobby?
- What parts of learning do you find difficult?
 - we can use this answer for our own research. If we know what they need help in, we can study this and find practice resources for the youth
- What parts of learning do you like?
 - We can use this answer to better gauge how to engage this youth. If they like reading stories in English class, we can find short stories to read together in other sessions.
- If you could live in any cartoon world, which would you choose and why?
- If you were to become famous today, what would it be for?
- What is the cutest animal in the world (share pictures through screen sharing if you like)
- What makes you laugh?
- What song makes you want to dance?
- What makes you feel happy?
- What is your favorite YouTube channel? Describe it.
- What is your favorite sport or physical activity?
- What or who are you thankful for?
- What skill do you want to be great at?
 - Ex. Painting, weightlifting, writing, basketball, archery, fixing cars, etc.

Additional Useful Info- **Play Personalities**

We all know kids like to play. We often think of play in terms of games but that's not always the case. There is concept outlined by Stuart Brown in the book **Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul**. It talks about the importance of play in child development and helps us understand the ways in which humans play. Sometimes what we think is a behavioral issue is just a kid trying to play. This makes a huge difference in how we treat the child. We can engage that kind of play and use it to teach and keep the child engaged. If a child likes to move, we can find games that involve learning and moving. It will help to reduce unnecessary disciplinary action and strengthens the trust and bond you share with the child.

Article about play personalities: <https://empoweredtoconnect.org/resources/whats-your-play-personality/>

Ted Talk with Stuart Brown (Highly recommend this video!!): https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_play_is_more_than_just_fun