



Timothy J. Seeley
Head of School

GSA February Report

Our first semester has finished, and the second one began January 25. In our new block schedule, that means that all the courses in the first semester are finished, and students begin four new ones.

Academics This Year

While most students did reasonably well the first semester, as I wrote in my November report, we knew as early as the end of the first quarter that 10% to 15% of our students were struggling with their academic programs, whether they were hybrid or remote. Both of these models demand more self-discipline and time management skills than these students have mastered. As a result, they began falling behind in their coursework and were at risk of not earning the course credit needed to advance. We could not let this happen; we could not let these students fail. In November, we created an “intervention” program to provide specialized teaching and learning opportunities for these students, and put it in place to begin after the Thanksgiving break. Struggling hybrid students now come to campus more frequently for in-person study halls with academic “coaches” and to meet regularly with teachers and support staff. For fully remote students, we created a “Remote Academy” with its own classes, curriculum, and teachers. Students in the Remote Academy now have a regular daily school experience that provides the content they need to advance academically and the support they need to succeed.

About 2/3 of the hybrid students in this program are now doing better. Of the fully remote students, those who have opted in and taken advantage of the new classes are much improved. See below on the others.

Some comments from the teachers involved:

“Over the first few weeks of the program, the students have made important strides. Attendance is tremendously improved, and the students are becoming more engaged by the day...Once hiding in the shadows, these kids are beginning to smile and interact with each other and even work hard to learn.

I think we all feel that class time is a joyful time to be together and learn on most days.”

— Jenn Jackson, Remote Academy Social Studies teacher

“With academic coaching, students visibly wake up, talk, share, help each other, even the most reluctant. They sit up, converse, start organizing and typing. With “live” encouragement, support, and empathy, students have brought up an unfinished essay or a slew of overdue art projects or a group project, and then set to work and later shared their work with the academic coach who can offer positive feedback and joy at seeing their cool Gothic story or their project input ... Fully remote students are “seen,” heard, and engaged from the moment they come into Zoom until they leave.”

— Kelly Cunnane, Remote Academy English teacher and Study Hall coach

We had not budgeted for this intervention program, but several friends of GSA, aware of the need, stepped forward to help fund it. We will require more help to cover costs, which we anticipate to run to \$50,000, and I am earnestly seeking funding support from our constituents.

I must also say it has not all been rosy. We have lost three fully remote students because they just never came to class, and their parents were either unresponsive to our outreach or unable to change their children's behavior. These students were reported to their school unions as truant, in the hopes that the state can bring more effective tools to bear on getting them to school than we were able to. One of the other struggling students transferred to the Harbor School; another has claimed he also transferred, but we have been unable to get confirmation. And we are still working with another to get her attendance at her remote classes more regular.

Recent COVID-19 Cases

I feel we have managed the recent uptick in cases in our county, and the resultant cases within GSA's community, well. As a high school, our challenge is that we really cannot create small cohorts. This means if an infected person comes on campus, they will have 25-35 or more close contacts who must quarantine, most likely 4 of whom are teachers. We can manage that number of quarantining teachers and still staff on-campus classes. When we have more than one case, as was most recently true, the number of teachers and ed techs who must quarantine can rise as high as 8 or more. In that instance, it is very difficult to run class on campus, and we are forced to go remote. That way, students actually have a better experience.

Thank you for all each of you is doing for the students and families in your town.

Respectfully,



Timothy J. Seeley
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