

## Grace

We've all heard it said, perhaps too many times, that we are living through something unprecedented... that we are all in this together... that we are figuring out the 'new normal'. And, as much as we might tire of those worn out phrases, they are all true.

It's also true that just as many people have returned to stores, places of employment, restaurants, and vacation spots, there are also people who have barely left their houses and their immediate families since the middle of March. Likewise, some people are anxious for students and teachers to return to school full time, while others are far from comfortable with that scenario and would advocate to keep schools closed and students learning remotely. Some people have medical conditions that put them at increased risk of significant complications should they come in contact with the virus. Others are concerned about what appears to be an increasing toll on the mental health of children and family members caused by continued separation from peers and teachers. Most of us, whether we realize it or not, are experiencing some level of trauma as a result of the events of the past six months.

As we navigate our way through what are truly uncharted waters, I have come to realize that there is no one "right way" to feel about any of this. We are all on our own personal journey with the challenges we've been individually, and collectively, confronting. What we need more than anything right now is grace.

We need to be willing to provide grace to others as they challenge our viewpoints, express their frustrations in less-than-productive ways, and sometimes say or do things that feel hurtful. Grace allows us to recognize and acknowledge that we all are struggling and sometimes we don't handle our struggles in helpful or kind ways. Grace allows the strength of our relationships to help us overcome the adversity that may, on occasion, arise as we try to problem solve issues we never thought we would need to struggle with or be asked to solve.

Perhaps most importantly, we need to be willing to give ourselves some grace. We need to acknowledge that we are not going to have this school thing all figured out by the time our students return to us on September 8th but we are going to do our best. We need to be more willing than ever before to take risks without being afraid of failing or being judged. We need to have patience with ourselves, our colleagues, our families, and our students as we all adjust to the reality of this coming school year. We need to give ourselves grace to feel what we are feeling, whatever that is, and be there in the moment for our students. They need us - and we certainly need them.

Offered with grace, and until next time...

Melanie

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### MISSION STATEMENT

**THE PCSD COMMUNITY WORKS COLLABORATIVELY TO INSPIRE AND PREPARE OUR STUDENTS TO BE THEIR BEST, DO THEIR BEST, AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.**

## *A few resources to consider...*

So much of what we know about teaching and learning feels like it is being turned upside down this year. Even the most experienced of teachers will be facing challenges in thinking about how to plan for instruction whether it is in our “in-person but spread out” model at the elementary level, the hybrid model at the secondary level, or the full remote learning model. The good news is, we are not alone in working through these challenges. Educators across the country (and across the globe) are working through similar questions and puzzles about how to plan for instruction that needs to be delivered in new and different ways. Listed below is a sampling of some resources that you might want to explore to assist you in this journey. Some of these may be familiar to you, and others might spark a new idea or provide you with the answer to a question you didn’t even know you had. In no way is this list exhaustive; my hope is that exploring one or two of these ideas will lead you to discover additional great ideas to support your instruction this year - no matter what that needs to look like!

**Some resources from the Edutopia website:**

[How to Make Remote or Hybrid Math and Science Instruction Engaging](#)

[7 Guidelines for Setting Up Clear Online Lessons](#)

[Essential Apps for the Physical and Digital Classroom](#)

**Caitlin Tucker’s work was new to me this summer, but she is someone worth getting to know:**

[A Flipped Learning Flow for Blended or Online Classes](#)

[10 Strategies Designed to Engage Elementary Students Online](#)

[8 Ideas Designed to Engage Students in Active Learning Online](#)

**This one was written for a college audience, but still has some useful ideas for us:**

[7 tips from Research for Effective Hybrid Teaching](#)

**A brief but useful article about using assessments in the remote/online environment:**

[Tips for Moving Exams Online](#)

**This article, by Eric Sheninger, takes what we know to be sound pedagogical practices**

(relevance, discourse, flexibility, personalization, and flexibility) and extends those into the remote environment. There are additional links embedded to take you deeper into the content with additional tools and strategies: [Keeping Kids Engaged in Remote Learning](#)

**Kevin Dorey, one of our SHS colleagues, found and shared the following two resources:**

[9 Ways Online Teaching Should Be Different from Face-To-Face](#) - This 45 minute podcast is by a woman in Western NY who works directly with teachers and districts just down the Thruway from us. She discusses everything that you have been dying to know about how to get your class started on the right foot in an online learning environment and emphasizes how you can build relationships while working in a distance learning situation.

[Teaching Your Class Online: The Essentials](#) - A five part (10 hours total) series from Stanford that provides lots of good tips and advice for teaching online, including how to do science labs, how to build relationships, etc. There are links to resources and the recorded presentations are at the bottom of the page.

*Resources to consider - continued on next page...*

## *Resources to consider, continued...*

**Dan Hosey, also from Sutherland, put together a couple of very useful videos and a spreadsheet**, explaining his thinking about how he will schedule his classes in the hybrid model, as well as some thoughts about the effective use of Teams, based on feedback he received from his students last spring. If you are a secondary teacher still trying to wrap your head around scheduling and making effective use of your in-person vs. remote days with your students, without sacrificing large chunks of your curriculum, **I would strongly suggest you watch Dan's videos.** (Thanks, Dan!!)

**Video:** <https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/2858c397-9a53-4ab8-a0f0-13b624aa64e9>

**Follow-up video:** <https://web.microsoftstream.com/channel/0b33d242-d35e-4898-88d4-e44c636bf457>

**Planning Spreadsheet:** [https://pittsfordcsd-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/daniel\\_hosey\\_pittsford\\_monroe\\_edu/EcuX0k9BWjhMislHi1otC8IBAtOY2BcUMIj3T\\_zC74YmQ?e=HmzbTg](https://pittsfordcsd-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/daniel_hosey_pittsford_monroe_edu/EcuX0k9BWjhMislHi1otC8IBAtOY2BcUMIj3T_zC74YmQ?e=HmzbTg)

**George Couros, a former teacher and principal, now working as an “Innovative Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Consultant”** and author has put together several articles and blogposts that speak to our current teaching and learning challenges. The tips he offers in the following two blogs are equally useful no matter whether you are teaching in the in-person, hybrid, or fully remote environment this year. And remember, everything he suggests you do within a google platform, you can do within an Office365 application as well:

[4 Ideas for Building Relationships During Remote Learning](#)

[4 Ideas for Empowering Students During Remote Learning](#)

**Each year we draw extensively from the resources developed by Paula Rutherford's JustASK** organization in our work with our new teachers. JustASK has pulled together a number of resources related to distance learning in their [Distance Learning Collection](#). Of particular note is the article entitled, [Ten Tips for Promoting Student Engagement During Online Sessions](#), by **Heather Clayton**, JustASK consultant and MCE principal!

This list of resources just begins to scratch the surface of what is out there to assist all educators in thinking differently about our instruction this year. I want to thank those of you who have already reached out to me to share ideas and I hope that we can continue to learn, grow, and add to our instructional toolboxes together this year as we take on new challenges in meeting the needs of our learners in a variety of settings and a variety of ways!

## *Induction Kicks off this week...*

This week we are welcoming 25 new certificated staff members to our Pittsford community. We have several new members of our special education department joining us, (including learning specialists, speech/language pathologists, and SSTs); teachers of multiple elementary grades as well as music, social studies, and science; a school psychologist and a behavioral specialist! The eclectic mix of new-to-Pittsford staff members always enriches our Induction program and I know that I am looking forward to getting to know all of these folks!

We want to welcome ALL of our new hires, no matter what your position, as you join Pittsford for what is sure to be a most unusual, and memorable, school year for all!

## *Instructional Roadmapping work*

This summer, teachers from all grade levels and nearly all courses came together in the Instructional Roadmapping professional learning experience to engage in important work and collaborative decision making regarding the unfolding of our curriculum during this unique school year. Making time in our teaching plans to re-acclimate students to school after a nearly six month absence, building in time to provide students with instruction on the use of our common technology platforms, and attending to the social/emotional needs of our learners through the thoughtful building of relationships and classroom culture all need to take priority during the first few weeks of the school year. We also know that there will be gaps in what students know and are able to do, based on the abrupt closure and emergency remote instruction put in place last spring. All of these factors, combined with the realities of what our learning models will look like this year, require us to think carefully about what, in each of our respective curricula, is most essential and how we engage students in that learning effectively.

In creating modified instructional roadmaps for this year, teachers considered the REAL criteria (Readiness, Endurance, Assessments, Leverage) from Larry Ainsworth to come to agreement on the “super hero” essential standards. Consideration was also given to places within the curriculum where teachers will need to pay particular attention to pre-assessments and scaffolding strategies in order to fill the known, and unknown learning gaps. This was challenging, but very meaningful and necessary work as it resulted in a shared understanding of, and commitment to, an instructional roadmap that represents the promises we are making to our students this year.

I want to thank all of the Standards Leaders for their support and leadership of this work this summer. Many of them attended multiple sessions of this workshop in order to support teachers of different courses or grade levels within their area of responsibility, once again showing us their “super hero” commitment to all of you!

## *The importance of collaboration and pacing*

We know that we are starting this fall with students learning in different models and different settings. When choosing the temporary learning model that was right for them (in-person vs remote, or hybrid vs. remote) we told families that they were committing to that model through the end of January. We do not know, yet, what the end of January will bring. Will we be able to return all students to school “as normal”? If not, will families continue with the model they selected for the remainder of the year, or will some choose to take the other pathway? If we need to re-mix students from one model into the other, what will that process look like? There are many questions that we, as a district, have not yet even begun to tackle as our focus has needed to be on preparing for September. Those answers will be forthcoming, but we just aren’t there, yet.

What is clear, however, is that more than ever before it is critical that teachers of the same course, or the same grade level, need to be working collaboratively - whether teaching in-school/hybrid or remote - to deliver the same essential curriculum as articulated in our adjusted instructional roadmaps using consistent pacing and sequencing for all students regardless of their learning model. To do otherwise will significantly disadvantage students who may need, or choose, to change learning models for the second half of the school year. At the very least, we need to know that students in both learning models for their level are working through the same units of instruction during the first half-of the school, otherwise significant gaps or unnecessary repetition will occur if students change learning models beginning in February.

Just as the students who will be learning remotely remain “our students” in every way, the teachers who are teaching those students need to remain fully engaged in collaborating and working with their colleagues. More than ever before, the ability of all students to fully access and succeed with our curriculum depends on collaboration among all members of a grade level or course-alike PLC.

## *What to do with Wednesdays?*

In the **hybrid learning model at the secondary level**, Wednesdays have been designated as “fully remote days”. All students will be learning from home on Wednesdays, regardless of which cohort they are assigned to. Many questions have been asked, by both teachers and parents, about what is expected on those fully remote Wednesdays.

Some basics, to get you started...

- ◇ Students are expected to follow their regular class schedule on Wednesdays.
- ◇ Teachers are expected to engage in some level of synchronous connection with their students on Wednesdays. That might be a five minute check-in with the whole group, it might be a full 40 minute lesson, or it might be a myriad of things in between.

Wednesdays are the only day of the week when an entire class of students will have the opportunity to be together in one space at the same time. For this reason, there are things you might choose to do on Wednesdays that you wouldn't, or couldn't, do on the other four days of the week. Wednesdays could be the perfect time for:

- ◇ Community building activities with the entire class;
- ◇ Establishment of class norms for the remote learning environment
- ◇ A guest speaker to be invited to present to the class, via zoom;
- ◇ Whole class discussion on an article, chapter, video, piece of text or music, that all students experienced either in-class or remotely during the previous two days of the week;
- ◇ Students to collaborate with members of their class that they don't get to work with on other days of the week;
- ◇ Clarification, with the entire class, of important skills and concepts prior to an assessment;
- ◇ A whole class mini-lesson before putting students in small groups in breakout rooms to work on a project together;
- ◇ Demonstration of new skill, or lab simulation activity;
- ◇ Teaching, or reinforcing the use of, a new feature in Teams;
- ◇ Presentations by students;
- ◇ The taking of an assessment that is appropriately designed for the remote setting.

Think about ways you could use the time creatively... take advantage of the ability to put students (strategically) into breakout rooms, have students come in and out of your synchronous setting, balancing the use of whole group, small group, and individual instruction as you would if you had all of your students in your physical classroom. Wednesdays, like every day, are important for moving our curriculum forward and supporting the learning of our students. They provide opportunities and challenges that are unique to the other four days of the week. Experiment, see what works well, and share your ideas with your colleagues!

**At the elementary level**, students will have a half-day on Wednesdays, providing time for teachers to collaboratively plan with their grade level colleagues and the other staff members supporting the learning pods at their grade level. Students should be sent home on Wednesdays with an asynchronous task to complete utilizing either Seesaw (grades K-3) or Teams, as way of giving them practice in a remote setting with the technology platform for their grade level. At the start of the year these tasks should be simple and serve as a way to assure all students have access to the necessary technology at home. It may be nothing more than having students send their teacher a message using Seesaw, their school email address, or within Teams. As the year progresses, the asynchronous task may increase in complexity as appropriate.

## *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity work continues...*

Sure, we've been in the middle of coping with a global pandemic, but that doesn't mean that Pittsford's commitment to our work around equity, diversity, and inclusivity has lessened in any way. If anything, the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on communities of color, along with the demonstrations that followed the murders of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor this summer only served to heighten awareness of the need for all of us to continue to work towards greater levels of equity in all that we do. To that end, there have been a number of important things taking place in PCSD over the past several months.

- ◇ The Inclusivity Advisory Committee continued to meet throughout the spring and summer months with a particular focus on examining the results of the climate surveys that were conducted in June, 2019. Data was disaggregated and analyzed for areas of strength and opportunities for growth.
- ◇ Board Policies 8310 *Purposes of Instructional Materials* and 8340 *Instructional Materials & Textbook Adoptions*, along with their associated regulations, have been amended to include requirements that all instructional materials and textbooks reflect the district's commitment to inclusivity and culturally responsive practices.
- ◇ Members of our high school English department have been working all summer on significant changes to our English 12 course offerings. One of the most significant changes is the addition of an entirely new course entitled **English 12: Visibility** which has a unique focus investigating race, class, ability, and gender in language and literature. In addition to work on the senior level courses, English teachers have been purposefully seeking out and adding more diverse texts to their courses at all grade levels.
- ◇ In reviewing the K-12 social studies curriculum, units of study have been identified that lend themselves to engaging students more purposefully with historical documents representing diverse perspectives, social justice, and civic-mindedness. This summer, U.S. History teachers for grades 7, 8, and 11 reviewed current textbook resources through the lens of diverse representation and identified new resources that will be used to supplement, or replace, existing texts. In addition, Pittsford has joined forces with other Monroe County school districts to work, in partnership with BOCES and the University of Rochester, on the development of inquiry-based units for 8th grade and 11th grade social studies that focus on local Rochester history from 1964 to the present day as it relates to race relations, red-lining, and the resulting segregation between the city of Rochester and many of its surrounding communities.
- ◇ Professional learning opportunities continued to be offered to staff this summer on the topics of *Cultural Competency and the Classroom* and *Microaggressions* as well as a book study organized around Zaretta Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain*.

Importantly our teachers are continuing to ask questions about how to approach discussions about race within their classrooms. This article, [Talking with Students about Racism and Protests](#), by the Crisis Management Institute, provides important reminders that we, as adults, do not need to have all the "answers" in these conversations. Our responsibility is to establish a safe space for students to speak, listen, and learn. We do that by modeling, inviting others to share, displaying true empathy, and by protecting the dignity of all members of the classroom community. Other resources to assist teachers in this work are available in the [Equity Toolkit](#) available on our website.

This is work that we will never be finished with. It is work that in all ways represents Pittsford's commitment to continuous improvement, to being student centered, and creating a supportive environment for all. Continuing our efforts toward being a more culturally proficient community is part of what continues to make Pittsford excellent.