

CSIU launches online learning resources

By Justin Strawser

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The Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit launched on Wednesday extensive online and printable resources for students, teachers and parents to use while learning from home during the COVID-19 crisis.

The CSIU, which serves 17 school districts in Columbia, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union counties in central Pennsylvania, has been charged by the state Department of Education to provide quality, innovative programs and services to enrich the learning and lives of students, educators and members of the community after Gov. Tom Wolf on Monday suspended school indefinitely. CSIU is also providing professional development for teachers.

“Sometimes a crisis brings people together,” said CSIU director of community outreach Bernadette Boerckel. “What we’re seeing is 17 school districts in our area moving the same direction and all trying to support the learning of their students. The amount of time they are putting in to create lessons and engage in students when they are home. It’s phenomenal. Everyone’s collective energy is meeting the needs of the people in our region.”

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The materials can be found on <https://www.csiu.org/learningresources>, which is intended to provide learning resources for districts, teachers, and parents who are supporting students' in-home learning environments during school closures. A variety of online communication tools and strategies will be used.

The point of this is not a complete curriculum; these are engaging activities that could supplement the materials, said Boerckel.

For parents

The Parent folder includes more detailed, weekly learning plans, to help enrich and supplement the home education of Pre-K-12 students. Teachers may also benefit from the plans in this folder which are specific to each grade and content level as well as college and career readiness, occupational and physical therapy, speech, and Hearing.

The website provides grade and content-specific links and

templates that can be visited or downloaded. The CSIU Helplines document provides email addresses that you may use to access experts in a variety of areas as you navigate online learning. Additionally, teachers will find professional development opportunities and spaces to share resources and experiences with colleagues.

Teacher involvement

Dr. Molly Nied, CSIU's director of academics who is the supervisor of the project, gathered a team of 30 teachers from various content and grade levels from several districts who helped to vet the resources and write the weekly lesson plans. Each Friday will include the complete set for the next week. The team has also considered those without internet access and created printable packets.

"These are a very talented and dedicated group of teachers who jumped right into action," said Nied. "We met Monday morning at 8 a.m. through Zoom (videoconferencing) and they had lesson plans created within 24 hours. We had this

vision to get resources into the hands of families and districts as fast as we can."

Many parents are working remotely, home while being laid off or coming home from high-stress jobs, so the CSIU wanted to "ease the burden for parents," said Nied.

"We know this is a really stressful time for families," she said. "The unknown can be scary."

Dr. Cheryl Latorre, a former superintendent at Danville Area and Mount Carmel Area, provided her expertise and experience to help launch the K-12 curriculum in less than a week. Latorre is a contracted consultant under Neid.

"Many parents right now are trying to do their jobs from home with a house full of kids and try to engage them," said Latorre. "We put a team together to build a comprehensive curriculum that any parent or a student can access."

The teachers have been "amazing," she said. "It's outstanding. They're putting things out and it can be used for a 365-day curriculum."

Alice Justice, a retired educator and counselor from Mid-West, Lewisburg Area and Central Columbia school districts, said the Zoom meetings have been "mini think tanks," where a lot of great ideas are coming out.

"I'm really excited," she said. "This is an array of materials for all grade levels. It's been a very rewarding, hectic and exhausting process, but I think the product in the first week is really good."

June Heeter, a first-grade teacher at the Danville Primary School, helped develop the curriculum. Danville developed its own curriculum, but this will give everyone access to the curriculum, she said.

"I will put the link directly on the web page so parents can access it in addition to what Danville is doing for students," she said. It has a lot of great information and activities on there. It's great for the little ones and the higher-ups. It gives them another resource to use while at home during this."

Heeter described the group as "an amazing group of peo-

ple" who is knowledgeable in the field.

The teachers involved in developing the curriculum who are also still planning to teach are all "superheroes," said Justice.

Classroom/supervisory staff will communicate with all families and survey them to determine the availability of technology in the home (tablet, computer, high-speed internet, email, phone calls, etc.) in order to determine the appropriate method of continuity of education delivery.

For families with limited access to technology, CSIU staff will provide printable student-specific enrichment and review packets. CSIU staff will ensure that the materials are delivered to families as needed. Home-schooling kits (construction paper, glue, scissors, Playdoh, etc.) will be provided to each preschool family. Families, if they are able, can also go to a spot with public internet access to download the materials.

There are resources for special education as well as graduation resources for seniors.