PTA Communication Conference
Spring 2021

Topics are as follows:
1. Technology
2. PTA's Role in 2021-2022

Technology:

1. **Can there be consistencies in how teachers communicate via technology?**
   Professional development and instructional technology training for teachers has been and will continue to be an ongoing focus for the District that, approximately one year ago, increased exponentially. Our analysis of best practices as well as the current and future incorporation of instructional technology related to both teaching and learning is an ongoing practice. The focus of the analysis includes teaching platforms, applications, pedagogy, sharing of best practices, teacher work groups, professional learning committees, implementation of learning management programs, and constantly iterating to the most current and best methodology for instruction and learning. Each of these play varying roles in the multitude of ways teachers and students have to communicate with one another outside of the classrooms. Student and teacher reflections and feedback on the past year are currently being used to inform instruction and learning decisions moving forward. Reactions and input from students and families has kept us informed throughout the year in areas needing additional student and teacher technology training, offering insight into the need for alignment within curricular areas for assignments and communication, and the ease of student access to class work and submission of assignments. Summer curriculum writing will include many significant projects, informed from all we have learned related to technology and instruction this past year, to iterate and to improve instructional content, practices, and communication/instructional platforms (i.e., Google Classroom at the elementary and middle school levels and Canvas for AP classes).

2. **Will remote days replace snow days?**
   The State allowed this option on a "pilot" basis for the 2021-22 school year. It's unknown whether they will make this option permanent. For the current year, our "bias" was toward using remote days whenever possible to maximize instruction and preserve time later in the year (like the Memorial Day weekend). If permitted, the most likely future scenario is that remote days will be added to the mix of options on severe weather days -- like 2-hour delays and closures -- to help manage the 180-day calendar.

3. **Will elementary school students still carry Chromebooks to and from school every day?**
   The 1:1 initiative allows our students to have their technology device for their own, personal, educational learning experience. The ability to have the majority of text, materials, assignments, and digital resources contained in a Chromebook greatly reduces the need to transport paper text, notebooks, and folders to and from school each day. The Chromebook also serves as a device to connect and to communicate with the classroom regardless of being in school or at home. As this year has shown, unfortunately, things pivot in a moment. The ability to have the technology on hand, rather than stored in a cabinet in school, can be a significantly important difference if and when needed.

4. **Will remote learning take place for sick students (Covid or otherwise)?**
   This is an interesting topic/concept that has many facets for consideration, including, but not limited to, the NYSED requirements for how student attendance is counted for in-person learners and for students not physically present in school. As all agree, the best place for students to receive instruction is in person. The hybrid learning platform was an emergency-related strategy, not a long-term strategy, and we have seen student engagement is not at the same level as in-person instruction. With a projected return to 100% in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 school year, the ability to provide on-going, quality, remote instruction, while simultaneously providing high quality in-person instruction for full classrooms of students would not be sustainable nor equitable. For long-term, extended health-related absences, the integration of technology into home-bound instruction to support learning from home will certainly play a role, however, the full return of all students into the school will no longer support the structure and planning necessary to facilitate live-streaming into the classrooms. It will not be feasible for students to log into instruction from home on a daily basis or due to travel-related absences.

5. **Will we have less time on screens as soon as social distancing guidelines are relaxed, so that students can do more collaborative and independent work <u>without</u> technology? Considering the amount of screen time the students have had, are there plans in place to slowly decrease it once protocols change?**
   We have held to our strong belief that instructional technology must serve to amplify instruction. If something can be done equally as well face-to-face, that is always the preference. This year it was necessary to rely more heavily on technology to provide for and to maintain continuity of instruction. Our goal for next year, as well as the future, is a return to return to the focus of using technology to enhance and to amplify teaching and learning. Our plan, moving forward, for technology's place in our classrooms is to

keep "the best of both worlds." The best practices of in-person learning, collaborative work, conferencing, peer discussions, small group learning, and 1:1 partner work will most definitely be incorporated into the heart and soul of daily lessons. The additional benefits that technology offers for "breaking down walls" and bridging distances between learners will continue to be used to bring together groups and classes and individuals. Technology has the ability to connect students that, due to physical barriers and distances (i.e., other classrooms, other hallways, other buildings, other states, other countries), would otherwise never have the ability to interact and to partake in a greater learning committee.

6. **A lot of parents feel there is a lack of understanding about what is happening in their children's classrooms, a feeling that is particularly magnified in this Covid environment as we cannot visit classrooms or be in the school at all. It would be nice to have a platform where parents can maybe log in to a live feed for the day - or have a page to visit so they could get information about what their kids are doing.**

> **Can there be standards in how google classroom is used, and the taking of pictures in the classroom?**

Each school has a dedicated Web Master responsible for working with the building admin and the district office to promote and highlight the daily goings-on in each and all of our classrooms. Many building principals, administrators, and teachers have appropriate social media accounts that capture special moments throughout the school day and highlight and celebrate daily achievements. The District also has multiple social media feeds that highlight all of the wonderful SYO Proud moments and accomplishments. We may need to further promote and to publicize these platforms so parents/guardians know how to access and what to follow to keep updated and informed in -real-time!

7. **If protocols remain the same as this past year, would it be possible to stream events for parents/grandparents to watch such as holiday shows or class celebrations?**

With the tremendous success of Varsity Media and the live streaming of sports activities, as well as the successful live-streaming of BOE meetings, the expectation is that this popular and successful platform will be something we continue to provide when possible as a way to stay connected with our Syosset learning community. It is important to note that many performances are not permissible to live stream, as we do not own the rights to the music and/or scripts, and there may be parents who have concerns with their students participating in a live streamed performance.

8. **Are the kids / teachers getting the most up to date items? The chrome books are becoming so slow.**
   With the onset of COVID, technology orders and materials were backlogged months longer than ever anticipated or imagined. Unfortunately shipments are delayed for technology purchased 6, 8, 10 months ago due to lack of product, COVID shipment delays, and world-wide high demand. The Chromebooks are on a rotational replacement cycle. We have entered into a Smart Bond process for the purchase of brand new technology for our students Grades K-12. This has allowed us to purchase 7,000 brand-new Chromebooks offering the highest level of Chromebook technology. Once the shipments arrive, all students K-12 will receive a brand new Chromebook for the 2021-2022 school year. This will establish a rotational repair and replacement cycle to ensure that our students have use of educational-appropriate, quality technology that supports learning and instruction and provides them with dependable resources for all of their academic needs. Teachers were provided with high-power laptops and classroom-to-go kits (document cameras and tablets to accompany the laptops) to amplify the connectivity during virtual instruction. The Middle Schools have all been outfitted with state-of-the-art Promethean Boards in every classroom and learning space to further enhance the ability to present high-quality interactive learning experiences for students, both in school and in the virtual learning environment.

9. **Are there specific technology apps, programs or equipment that the District felt specifically worked well for students with learning differences/challenges during this past year of Covid challenges and remote learning? Are there any new technology apps, programs or equipment the District will be providing to students with learning differences/challenges during the 2021/2022 school year?**
   Fortunately, due to our District philosophy of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), we had many apps/extensions already in place to support students with learning differences/challenges prior to COVID. These apps/extensions foster the use of multiple modalities in technology so that students can express their knowledge in a flexible learning environment following the basic guidelines of UDL, namely, to provide multiple means of engagement, representation and expression. This presentation on Universal Design for Learning provides an overview of some of the assistive technology being used. We have found this technology to be helpful for all students.

   Listed below are a few examples.

   The Flipgrid app which allows the use of multimedia, such as pictures, videos, drawing, keyboarding. The students are given a prompt (in any media) and can then choose how to respond, respecting different learning styles. Students can also work with other students using this app fostering collaboration between peers.

Read and Write For Google - This extension offers a range of powerful support tools to help students gain confidence with reading, writing, studying and research. It provides text-to-speech, voice recognition, screen masking, vocabulary support, word prediction, grammar support, and study skills.

Book Creator is an amazingly easy-to-use digital book-making tool with over 230 accessibility features. It allows students to produce and publish their own simple books or comics with images, videos, and audio.

Learning A-Z/Raz Kids is an award-winning teaching product that provides comprehensive leveled reading resources for students. Kids access their leveled text through an interactive learning portal designed to keep them motivated and engaged.

SeeSaw is a platform for student engagement. Students use creative tools to take pictures, draw, record videos and more to capture learning in a portfolio. Teachers find or create activities to share with students.

myOn Reader is a student-centered, personalized literacy environment that gives students access to more than 6,000 enhanced digital books. Titles are dynamically matched to each individual student's interests, grade and Lexile reading level. Combined with a suite of close reading tools and embedded supports, myON Reader fosters student engagement and achievement.

Wixie is a publishing and creativity platform that lets students share what they know through their writing, their voice, and their art.

The Google Apps are also rife with accessibility options for our students. For example, google docs has voice typing capabilities, google slides has alt text for images and various keyboard shortcuts, Jamboard, a collaborative digital whiteboard, allows students to collaborate in the same space though drawing, adding images, text boxes, etc.

At this time, there are no plans to purchase any new apps/extensions or equipment through special education. However, we are constantly researching and investigating technology tools and applications to enhance and to maximize student learning experiences and to offer every opportunity for students to be successful and to fully engage in their learning.

10. **Microsoft Teams for parent/teacher conferences is not reliable. Many parents were posting online that they were unable to connect to the teacher(s). Is there another option available? Or maybe the system was overwhelmed and multiple options (by department?) could be utilized. Teacher Reacher Concern as well.**

The feedback we have received from parents and faculty related to the scheduling and implementation of teacher/parent conferences was and continues to be most helpful. Currently we are balancing the needs for confidentiality, minimal and smooth transition time between meetings, and the challenge of systems being overwhelmed with large numbers of simultaneous users either registering or engaging in meetings. Teacher Reacher has been working with us and our neighboring Districts to further develop their platform and to put systems in place to mitigate the overload and malfunction of their site during the parent/guardian "sign-up" windows. They are also aware of the concerns we have shared regarding the ability to log-on to scheduled meetings during scheduled conferences. As pointed out, Microsoft Teams was tried as a possible replacement, but that too had glitches and challenges, and proved to be an unreliable platform for the conferences and the transitions needed to host the multitude of independent, confidential, parent teacher conferences that take place simultaneously on our conference nights. Improving this process for parents and teachers is a priority, and we continue our research as well as our own work towards the development of a more reliable, consistent, and dependable platform for scheduling and hosting our parent-teacher conferences.

11. **The concept of virtual parent/teacher conferences, IEP Meetings, Guidance meetings etc. is excellent and allows working parents to attend or view an event after it has occurred. Would the district consider this as an option going forward? Making it hybrid so there is both in-person and virtual simultaneously for an event?**
Yes, when possible, virtual meetings will be offered. We understand the importance of face-to-face meetings, but also the need for flexibility.

12. **Would the same (above) be considered for school sports?**
We found the streaming platforms to be very successful for school athletic competitions, enabling parents to watch their children compete even if other obligations prevented them from physically attending. In addition, it provided recordings which could be used for college recruitment or to rewatch later. We anticipate this will continue into the future.

PTA's Role in 2021-2022:

1. **How will you allow parents and assembly performers back into the school? Will parents be allowed back into the building next year?**
DOH and CDC guidance would inform and ultimately determine the answer to this question as would the COVID case rates at any given time. For the current year, we

wanted to reduce the number of persons in the building to those absolutely necessary to avoid unnecessary potential exposure to COVID-19 and to reduce the number of persons who would need to undergo contact tracing and quarantining as a result of exposure. For next year, we hope to incrementally add back things we were unable to offer this year, as long as it is safe to do so.

2. **Will they need to prove they had a Covid vaccination before they can come?**
DOH and CDC guidance would determine the implementation of a requirement of this nature.

3. **What is the future for events where historically people were packed into school buildings (ie., concerts, graduations)?**
DOH and CDC guidance would determine the answer to this question. Current guidance requires limitations to in-person attendance, and testing/vaccination requirements for larger gatherings.

4. **Will school-day events (including student government, STEM fair, lunch clubs, in-person assemblies, etc.) be on the table for next year? (Some of these are not run by the PTA, but they're activities that the students are missing this year.)**

   5. **Will we be able to have building use again for after-school events and activities (PTA sponsored, as well as, sports and clubs/Girl scouts)?**

   6. **What will event capacity be?**

   7. **Will there be PTA Room Reps, class parties, etc.? If parents are not allowed, will we still be able to have birthday and holiday parties? Will (district allergy-list approved) food be allowed?**

   8. **Will assemblies and PTA sales be allowed in the fall if they are outside only?**

   9. **When guidelines change about indoor meetings, will we be allowed to host PTA meetings and events in person?**

DOH and CDC guidance would inform and ultimately determine the answer to these questions. Our hope is to return step by step to the programs that we enjoyed before the pandemic.

10. If clubs are allowed, who will decide which clubs are available?

Secondary clubs continued this year. At the elementary level, each year the building principals and administration review the clubs that have been previously run, review requests for new clubs, secure teacher/adult advisors, and present the requests to the BOE for approval. Once approved, clubs are then offered in all of the buildings K-5. Syosset is unique in that it offers elementary club opportunities for our students during the school day.

Additional Question on Many Minds:

1. What will class size be for next year on all levels?

With an approval to return to all in-person learning and no further restrictions on social distancing beyond 3', class sizes would once again return to their pre-pandemic (contractually limited) numbers district-wide.