

5/15/20

What we've learned from our e-learning journey

By David F. Larson, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Glenbard Township High School District 87

Foundational to the strong reputation of any respected, high performing, comprehensive high school are a few fundamental components. These key principles include:

- Ensuring a guaranteed viable curriculum for every student
- Having dedicated and talented instructors
- Offering an array of co-curricular and extracurricular programming (clubs, sports, visual/performing arts, etc.) and
- Leveraging strong relationships between students and staff.

But what happens when your system is suddenly disrupted and you must adjust, almost immediately, to a remote learning environment? For the Glenbard high schools, the week of March 16 required the quick shifting of routines, approaches and practices as we transformed into a new e-learning landscape.

Just what have we learned -- or been reminded of -- as we have navigated this unique and novel journey? The following are just a few of the facts we've been reminded of and the lessons learned.

Graduating Seniors are Strong, Resilient

While confronted with disappointment of missing memorable senior events and experiences, Glenbard District 87 graduates have chosen to be positive, undaunted and optimistic.

Disruption Can Result in Innovation

Despite not being face-to-face with their students, Glenbard instructors have designed learning tasks that incorporate research, explorations, discussions, collaborative work, creation and reflection.

Relationships Matter

Students appreciate, need and thrive on important relationships with their classmates and especially with their instructors. Addressing students' social emotional needs, particularly as students are experiencing isolation, is paramount.

Student Attendance and Engagement Matter

Student commitment, effort and being responsive to feedback remains key to the learning process.

Parents are Important Partners

Students need their parents' love and support, but they also need their parents to be engaged in helping them set daily schedules, routines and boundaries.

Smart Deployment of Tech Tools, Apps Can Result in Deep Learning

Students and staff are staying connected via videoconferencing. Staff use multiple tech tools to communicate with families, including email, texts and calls through Remind, and messaging through our learning management system.

Students Thrive When Given the Opportunity for Choice, Self-Direction

Many teachers are offering students a menu of options for the week with a variety of learning tasks and opportunities. Students choose the best assignments for their own learning, based on their interests and needs.

Technology Resources and Support Matter

Good devices, learning management systems infrastructure, helpful apps, instructional coaches and tech support all make a difference in ensuring students and staff are confident and supported in an e-learning environment.

Incorporating Skills with Content is Transformational

In lieu of a multiple choice final exams, students are researching, writing and creating. They are recording videos that show their learning. Students are learning about how these subjects work in the real world.

Glenbard District 87 was well positioned with technology devices and infrastructure as we embarked on this unexpected e-learning journey. We also realized that organizations can learn, grow and get better during a challenging crisis. Like you, we don't know what the future holds, but we know that through research, collective resolve, innovative thinking and collaboration, we are in a good position to continue supporting, empowering and teaching our students.