



Communicator

Regional news, views and information

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Education
Electronic Edition

July 2020

How School Leaders Have Stepped Up To The Challenges of a Pandemic

by Maria Erlandson, RCE Principal Leadership & Education Systems Support

The drastic changes that COVID-19 brought to our schools required school administrators to take their leadership to a whole new level. School leaders needed to help their staff begin teaching students in a way that no leadership training had prepared them for. However, as I have had a chance to work and talk with many school leaders over the last few months, I've found some common elements that have helped leaders continue to lead their schools through very different times. I've elected to refer to them as the "Five C's of Change Leadership."

C**ommunication** is critical for any crisis situation. Even when the school leader wasn't sure what was happening, it was critical that they were communicating with staff, students, parents and the community at large. Changes often come rather slowly in education, but this spring was a different story. Plans had to be made and communicated with stakeholders quickly - and in creative ways to be sure everyone received messages. School leaders were using their websites, social media and YouTube videos to communicate in ways they never had before.

If students weren't checking in with their teachers, the principal was often the one working to help the student find ways to make those connections.

School leaders also needed to work to find ways to connect students to technology, and meals, to assure the students had what they needed during this difficult time.

C**oaching** was an important way school leaders could support their staff during distance learning. When teachers were required to quickly shift to a very different model of teaching, they often needed the coaching and support of their administrator. Frequent check-ins with individual teachers and groups of teachers were an important way for administrators to provide support and advice to teachers as they planned for distance learning.

C**ollaboration** with stakeholders and colleagues helped school leaders plan effectively. I participated in principal and superintendent regional network calls, and believe the collaboration and support from other leaders helped everyone get through this together. While none of this has been easy, I believe everyone has found that working through this together has been key to making sound decisions.

C**ommittment** of school leaders to their students, staff and the community at large. While I'm sure there were days when leaders felt ready to give up, their commitment and leadership was essential to helping their schools and districts make it through this time of emergency distance learning. While we don't know for sure what this Fall will look like, there is a committed group of educators that are already working on a plan to make the return to school a great beginning.

C**onnections** were crucial in maintaining relationships during distance learning.

In a world where people are forced to stay apart, how can leaders help teachers continue to find ways to make connections with students and families? Leaders had to be intentional when working with staff to be sure students were getting regular interaction with their teachers and with other students.

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From the Desk of the Executive Director, Jeremy Kovash



During the Independence Day holiday, I was able to spend some time in solitude. Reading several opinion articles from conservative and liberal media, thinking about what to do as a grateful leader of an organization with many community connections, and reflecting on our Lakes Country Service Cooperative motto, "Together We Achieve."

How can we achieve more? What traits must we lean into for advancement; as an organization and to the members we serve? What can I do to gain a deeper understanding of my own biases and imperfections?

I chose to have some deep conversations with my family. My three boys (ages 15, 18 and 20), understandably are confused, but perhaps less confused than I. We talked about self-reliance, understanding, empathy and history. We talked about toppled statues, peaceful protests and engagement.

Truthfully, I'm not sure we accomplished much, but I did come to one clear realization: We need to learn or re-learn how to live in a society where we can have dialogue. We need to learn how not to be offended simply by the mere mention of names: Trump, Obama, Pelosi, Roberts, Jesus Christ or Mohammed. We need to dialogue honestly and with humility. We need to forgive.

This week, a newly formed "Leadership Council" at Lakes Country Service Cooperative will begin its focus on these questions. How can we serve and lead? How can we help our members and communities to better achieve equality and success? No doubt; we have our challenges. No doubt; we have much work to do. But no doubt; we must put forward a stronger effort.

We hope you enjoy this issue of The Communicator as we are humbled to be your cooperative.

Together We Achieve...



One Person Can
Make a Difference

We have partnered with Northwest Service Cooperative to bring the ***One Person Can Make a Difference*** program to Lakes Country Service Cooperative! This program provides the opportunity to recognize LCSC staff and members for their hard work and the outstanding contributions they make to their organizations. Visit our website at www.lcsc.org for more information.

How to Nominate Someone

Fill out the nomination form by clicking the link below and tell us what your staff member does to go above and beyond! We will notify the individual letting them know they are being recognized. To nominate your staff member, click here: [NOMINATE](#)

Congratulations to those who have been nominated thus far!
Visit our website to see past & present nominees.

Keeping Connected At A Distance

by Naomi Miranowski, Regional Center of Excellence School Climate Support

Abruptly, and without much warning, the physical classrooms we shared with our students were empty. We were then tasked with recreating those spaces online... amid a global pandemic.

Now, more than ever, social emotional learning and maintaining connections and relationships with our students is paramount to student success. The [research](#) is clear; when children spend their days in safe, supportive schools with caring adults who work to build strong relationships, children are more engaged learners. Creating this sense of connectedness is a new challenge for educators when everything's gone remote.

Because teaching in a distance learning environment is new for so many of us, here is a list of ideas to help you prioritize relationships with your students and stay connected, while so many of us are staying apart.

1. **Make daily, or weekly connections with students, making sure to incorporate ways for students to see your face.** Make phone calls, send text messages, make a daily recording of yourself delivering a morning message, or reading a book. Send postcards in the mail - definitely still fun for kids to get their own treats in the mailbox. Hold regular video chats or create a class blog with daily prompts in which students can offer a response. Remember to recognize that students learning and connecting preferences are unique to each student. Some students may not like to talk on the phone, and others may not like to video chat. Because of this, it is important to find individualized ways to connect with students.
2. **Establish a block of time each day where students can call (either by telephone or virtually) a trusted adult such as a teacher, counselor or other staff.** Keeping in mind that some students may not feel comfortable or aren't used to taking the initiative to reach out to adults or teachers. To ensure student-teacher check-ins, make sure you're finding and offering different ways for students to check in.
3. **Set up daily/weekly meetings or advisories in order to establish a time to connect with a group of students.** Assign a small number of students to each teacher so that teachers can continue working to support a core group of students and creating meaningful connections with them throughout this crisis.
4. **Have dress up days** for a week during your class meetings. Kids can wear pajamas, certain colors, hats, clothing backwards, be a superhero, or dress up as a favorite book character to incorporate some fun within the meetings.

5. **Play a game.** Hold a [Scavenger Hunt](#), play Hangman, BINGO, or even charades!
6. **Use show and tell strategically.** Send out a show and tell schedule for the week; Monday they could show their pet or favorite stuffed animal. Tuesday they could share an item in their house that holds sentimental value. On Wednesday they could share something that begins with the first letter of their name, and so on.
7. **Have the students each build their own blanket fort.** Have class while everyone is in their forts. Many participating in this are calling it "Fortnite"!
8. **Eat lunch together.** Utilize a platform like Zoom or Google Meets, to host "lunch bunch" get-togethers. Rotate attendees in order to connect with just three to four students at a time so that you're able to devote time to each student and catch up with everyone.
9. **Be human first: set the tone of caring more about their physical and mental well-being than academics.** Make time to simply check in with one another and let students share how they're feeling during this historic time. Let students offer one another support and comfort. Make time to laugh and share funny stories. Show students how we are stronger together and how first and foremost, it is our job to make sure they are OK.
10. **Have virtual parties and celebrations.** Celebrate student birthdays or have a virtual party when class goals are met.
11. **When you're unsure what's needed, ask students for input.** Incorporating student voices is always a great way to create a positive school climate. Students who have a say in their educational experience are more likely to be engaged learners. Ask students what would help them to stay connected. Many times, students are aware of technological tools and how to use them before adults are. They may be able to help lead the way for a better distance learning experience.

Teaching and learning throughout the pandemic has brought about its challenges, however, it has also shown just how creative and connected teachers are to their students. Despite not being able to connect within the usual classroom environment, relationships with students remains a priority. I hope some of these ideas will assist in staying connected with students all while remaining apart.

SOURCES

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/safeschools/wellbeing>

<https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/truth-for-teacher-podcast/connecting-with-kids-when-teaching-remotely>

<https://educationtothecore.com/2020/04/ways-to-connect-with-your-students-during-distance-learning/>

Students, We Are Listening!

by Courtney Henderson, Regional Center of Excellence School Advocate

This spring, distance learning has affected educational systems across the globe and continues to do so. School personnel are recognizing the inequities within distance learning and what appears to be a lack of student engagement as schooling proceeds from home. We want to know if this is truly the case, or if perhaps, this time of distance learning is merely exposing a crack in our system that has become more visible as we step away from brick and mortar buildings? Schools want to know!

In an effort to hear from all students and uplift their voice, the Regional Centers of Excellence through Lakes Country Service Cooperative is partnering with Region IV schools to hold key informant interviews with students and families in Pre K - 4th grades as well as focus groups with students in 5th - 12th grades this summer.

The diverse student and family groups will center on three questions:

1. When thinking about Distance Learning, what did/do you LIKE?
2. When thinking about Distance Learning, what did/do you NEED?
3. When thinking about Distance Learning, what did/do you WISH?

A summary of feedback gathered from students and families will be compiled and shared immediately with district teachers and administrators. The summation of this information will be used in planning for teaching, learning and decision-making regarding students likes, needs and wishes for the fall. Lakes Country Service Cooperative will also share the similarities and patterns discovered from students' feedback with Region IV schools when the key informant interviews and focus groups are complete. This will enable all districts the ability to focus on student priorities as they begin working on plans for school in the fall.

Do Your Best Work By Staying Healthy

COVID-19 poses an extreme challenge to us all on a personal and professional level. Like you, the LCSC Health and Safety department is experiencing the difficulties of isolation, the hours of sitting at a computer, the lack of working interpersonally and the challenge of teaching online.

Our daily work is to help our schools build a safe and healthy culture that contributes to the ability of everyone in the school knowing how to maintain a safe environment, without losing focus on students.

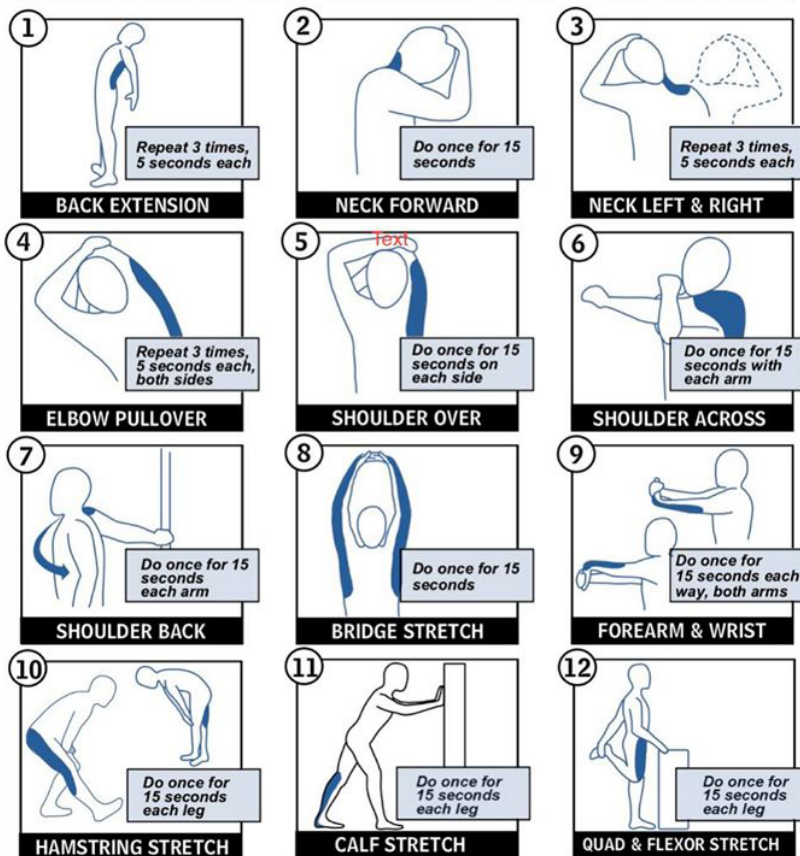
We are inspired daily by the work so many of you are doing to keep buildings clean and sanitized, to keep yourselves and your colleagues safe by social distancing and wearing personal protective equipment (did you ever think PPE would become a household word?) and the constant planning needed in these uncertain times.

We're here to partner in your planning efforts, answer your health & safety questions, and help communicate those important safety messages to all. We'd like to remind you that to keep yourself healthy is to keep others healthy.

And for those long hours at the computer, give yourself a break! Here are some easy stretches you can do at home or in the office.

Stretches for Home & Office

Do these quick stretches regularly to reduce fatigue and avoid injury:



Check with your physician before starting a new exercise program or if you have had recent joint trouble, muscle problems, or surgery

MN Education Policy Fellowship (MNEPF)

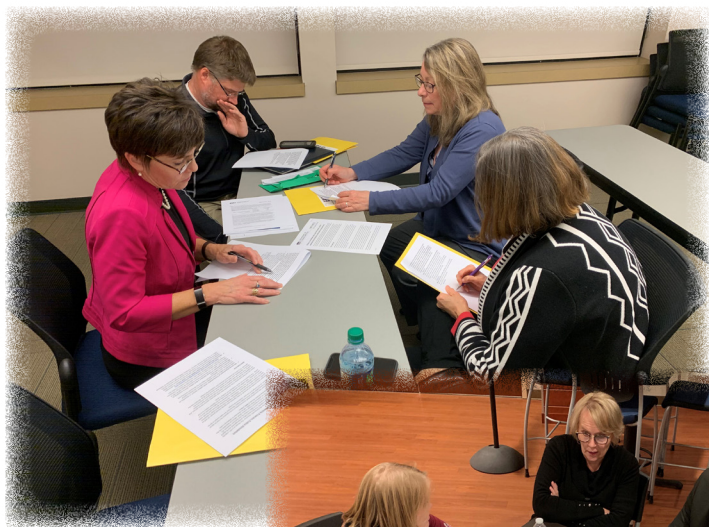
by Troy Haugen, Director of Career & College Readiness

Last year, the first-ever rural cohort of the Minnesota Education Policy Fellowship was hosted by Lakes Country Service Cooperative. In attendance were 10 fellows from rural lakes country and 15 fellows from the Metro. The fellows participated in a year-long professional development focusing on education policy at the state and federal level. The policy fellowship intended to culminate with the Washington Policy Seminar in March, but COVID-19 has delayed that experience indefinitely.

Carey Johnson, Principal of Parkers Prairie High School shares about her experience as a fellow within the fellowship; *“The experience of MNEPF raised my critical thinking ability ten-fold. The perspectives of multiple lenses, not only on educational policy, but also on humanity, have changed both my thinking and the person I am working to become.”*

Lakes Country Service Cooperative’s Director of Career & College Readiness, Troy Haugen is currently in the midst of recruiting for next year’s fellowship. Although the fellowship for next year may look different due to the unknown nature of COVID-19, the goal to further fellows’ professional development within federal and state education policies remains the same.

If you are interested in learning more about the fellowship, please email Troy Haugen at thaugen@lscs.org or call 218-737-6511. The fellowship is limited to ten fellows per year and applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the fellowship is full. The 2020-2021 cohort will begin in late September.



Context, in my opinion, is the understanding of a specific situation within the broader scope and scenarios that have led up to a specific juncture in time.

Prior to enrolling in EPFP, I had very little knowledge of the broader picture of educational policy. Within any specific situation, it is critical to understand what has led up to the problem, what key concepts are being addressed at the root of the problem, and under what context within the bigger picture this problem plays into the overall current educational policy scope.

EPFP has helped me take that 30,000-foot view of educational policy and be able to understand where problems originate from and what potential policy windows may open to allow for change to occur.

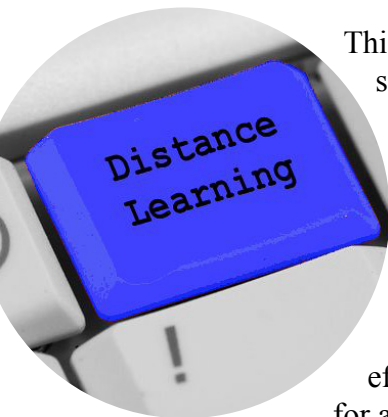
That kind of foresight is something that all leaders in education need to develop if we are going to make real change in education nationwide.”

– Eric Sawatzke, EPFP Fellow and West Central Area Schools Agriculture Teacher



Tech Tips & Tricks - Distance Learning Edition

by Megan Peterson, Tech Integration Coordinator & Monica Thompson, Tech Integration Specialist



This spring there was a rapid transition to distance learning for schools. Teachers worked tirelessly to find effective ways to continue instructing virtually all while maintaining relationships and connecting with their students. Teachers are now utilizing several new and different tools and strategies to connect with and manage students' assignments via multiple digital platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Seesaw, Google Classroom, and Schoology.

The abrupt changes and switch to utilizing mostly technology to effectively connect and instruct students has been a learning process for all involved. To assist with this process, we would like to provide some tech tips and tricks that we have found to make the distance learning experience better for students and teachers!

For additional help or training, please reach out to Megan Peterson (mpeterson@lcsc.org) or Monica Thompson (mthompson@lcsc.org).

LEARN ABOUT
OUR TIPS FOR
Google Classroom
Seesaw

LEARN ABOUT
OUR TIPS FOR
Google Classroom
Organization

Let's Do Some Reading!

by Jerome Evans, Cooperative Purchasing Connection

Cooperative Purchasing Connection (CPC) has partnered with two phenomenal literacy-focused vendors!



Want to incorporate current events into your reading program? Newsela offers contemporary news articles at different reading levels! Review their offerings at [Newsela.com](https://newsela.com) and then learn about the discounts offered through CPC by reviewing Newsela's Vendor Profile Page.



If you're interested in books, magazines, and other publications across formats - look no further than CPC partner Complete Book and Media! Even better, when you use the CPC contract you'll get 15% off of your first order! You can access Complete Book two ways; 1. Log in [directly to their website](#) or 2. Use [CPC Express](#)! CPC Express provides worry-free ordering through its online marketplace. Log in now to view Complete Book and Media's entire catalog.



Your Public Library - Here for You!

by Erin Smith, Viking Library System Director

The Viking Library System (VLS) was first organized in 1975. Eleven member libraries and the VLS bookmobile serve the six west central Minnesota counties of Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens and Traverse.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vitally important residents continue to receive library services in a manner that prioritizes health and safety. VLS area residents are using some library services in record numbers during this time and library staff have responded with innovative service options.

VLS has provided ebooks and downloadable audiobooks since 2011 through the OverDrive/Libby platform and in 2017, libraries also added Hoopla (ebooks, downloadable audiobooks, streaming video and music) to the suite of electronic resources available free with your library card. Check-outs in Overdrive/Libby grew nearly 30% over last year's numbers in March and April. No library card? No problem. You can now register for a card online at viking.lib.mn.us/card-registration.

In addition to the electronic resources mentioned above, your library provides a wide range of databases available free to use with your library card, including ELM (magazine and newspaper articles, consumer information and research databases). TumbleBooks (ebooks for youth and teens) has also made their resources free to library patrons through August 31 of this year. Some VLS member libraries also offer databases to assist you with doing genealogy research online or learning a foreign language. Visit your library's website to explore the wide variety of electronic resources available from the comfort of your home.

VLS member libraries and the bookmobile also continue to get books, DVDs, audiobooks and more to you during this time through contactless curbside pick-up and delivery services. Contact your library to learn more about curbside pick-up options or, if you are a bookmobile user, visit viking.lib.mn.us/bookmobile to learn more about contactless delivery.

Now that it is officially summer in Minnesota, many libraries and the bookmobile have launched, or will soon launch, their annual Summer Reading programs. While these programs will look a little different this summer (as many of our summer activities will be in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), your library has created fun and exciting ways to keep children and families engaged and learning during the important summer months.

When students engage in learning activities during the summer through their local library, they are better prepared to go back to school in the fall. This summer, kids can participate in activities through their library online, on paper and/or in their communities through a wide variety of options including, tracking their reading online (or on a paper log) to earn prizes, outdoor community activities like story walks and scavenger hunts, virtual story times and book clubs, and much more.

To learn more about all the fun ways youth (and adults) can participate in summer reading, visit your library's website or give them a call. Your public library is here to serve you during these uncertain times and beyond. Take care, and stay safe.

FIND YOUR LIBRARY

Browns Valley Public Library
brownsvalleymnpubliclibrary.org
320-695-2318

Douglas County Library
douglascountylibrary.org
320-762-3014

Thorson Memorial Library (Elbow Lake)
elbowlakepubliclibrary.org
218-685-6850

Fergus Falls Public Library
ffpubliclibrary.org
218-739-9387

Glenwood Public Library
glenwoodpubliclibrary.org
320-634-3375

Hancock Community Library
hancockcommunitylibrary.org
320.392.5666

Morris Public Library
morrispublib.org
320-589-1634

New York Mills Public Library
nymphpubliclibrary.org
218-385-2436

Pelican Rapids Public Library
prlibrarycatalog.org
218-863-7055

Perham Area Public Library
perhamlibrary.org
218-346-4892

Wheaton Community Library
wheatoncommunitylibrary.org
320-563-8487

Viking Library System Bookmobile
viking.lib.mn.us/bookmobile
218-739-5286



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Lisa Tuma (left) and Susy Swaggert (right)
shop on the Express online marketplace.

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