

“Thoughts on Teaching during the pandemic”

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My name is Streeter Stuart and I am a World History teacher at Penn Manor High School in Millersville, Pennsylvania. I am in my 23rd year at Penn Manor, and I am here today to briefly share some of the concerns teachers have faced while trying to educate our students during the past year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers, no matter what format their school is currently following, are still struggling to keep our heads above water, no matter what format a school district may be operating under.

Full Time In-Person - Teachers whose schools are back full time still have daily frustrations. Attendance is not consistent as contact tracing places many perfectly healthy students into quarantine, and families keep children home from school even for the most minor of health issues, now concerned that any symptom might be Covid-19. And while many teachers are more than happy to be back in the classroom with their kids and don't have a huge fear concerning the virus, others, especially those with underlying health conditions, are teaching with great anxiety concerning Covid-19.

Hybrid Learning - Teachers in schools following a hybrid schedule struggle to get to know their students, because often they are only in school twice a week. And if students are absent or quarantined on those days, we can go several weeks without ever setting eyes on our own students. Additionally, many schools have asked teachers to live stream their in-person classes so students at home can follow along. And this is especially challenging to teachers, because it's almost impossible to fully engage students in the classroom while also trying to keep cameras focused on our actions so students at home can see what we're doing. Anyone who thinks that simply placing a camera on a teacher in a classroom is an effective method of instruction doesn't appreciate how challenging it is to engage a classroom of kids and make the classroom a positive learning environment. Trying to do this while also working to engage students in their homes has greatly limited what many of us do in the classroom to keep our students engaged.

Full Virtual – A major frustration of full-virtual learning is that it denies students who thrive in a classroom setting the opportunity to learn to their full potential. Even before Covid-19, online education (“virtual school”) was already an option for most PA students, and some students thrive in that format. Homeschooling has also long been an option for PA families, and many students thrive in that setting. So for some students, learning during Covid-19 might not be a negative experience. But we can't deny that many students thrive when in a classroom being instructed by capable, knowledgeable teachers. And unlike students who thrive in a virtual or homeschool setting, students who thrive in a classroom are not given a choice to receive an education that most benefits them. Consequently, it is students who WANT to be in school who are most negatively impacted by school closures and virtual learning.

None of us can be sure when public schools will return to normal. Already there are rumblings that some schools are already planning for the possibility that school closures might continue into the next school year. With virtual school and homeschooling already an option for students in Pennsylvania, it is my hope that if Covid continues to interrupt our normal routines into the 2021-2022 school year, students who want to be full-time in the classroom have the opportunity to do so. Although every

format, including full-time in-person instruction, has its challenges, ultimately we as educators are here to serve the needs of our students. And our students who *want* to be in the classroom each and every day during the school year ought to have the opportunity to do so.

I also hope that the State will consider amending the current quarantine procedures to allow a student removed from the classroom due to contact tracing to be allowed back into the classroom if they receive a negative Covid test result. An overwhelming majority of students placed in quarantine do not end up testing positive for Covid, and to have healthy students removed from the classroom for sometimes weeks at a time is a very unfair burden to place upon a student.

In summary, I'd like to make one more comment:

There's a reason why people often complain that our news organizations only focus on bad news. It's because "good" news isn't always news worthy. We don't highlight a successful airplane flight, and it's not a big story when people drive safely to and from their homes. What IS newsworthy is when these routine tasks end in disaster, which is why plane crashes or automobile accidents DO make the news. It's also the reason we have heard about situations like the one that exists in Chicago where public teachers have refused to return to the classroom over fears of the Coronavirus. We hear about the Chicago situation because it's a situation that is out of the ordinary. In general, teachers have answered the bell and embraced whatever educational challenge was put in front of them. Many Pennsylvania teachers may have struggled with the *countless* hours it took to create online lessons, but they did it anyway. Many Pennsylvania teachers might struggle figuring out how to teach students who are in their classrooms while simultaneously being required to teach students who are at home, but they strive to do it, to the best of their abilities, anyway. And without question, there are teachers in every school district in Pennsylvania who DO share the same concerns about being in the classrooms that teachers in Chicago have expressed, and yet these very same teachers still come to school, put masks and shields on their faces, and teach their hearts out anyway. So we ask the legislature to remember this: Don't focus on a few negative stories you hear. Instead, please remember that the majority of Pennsylvania's teachers have gone above and beyond in an effort to educate our students.

Although I am just one teacher and these are my own personal sentiments, I do believe that many educators would echo much of what I have said today. Thank you for the opportunity to share a few of my thoughts.

Streeter Stuart