



Alight

FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS



Adapting Practices Amid the Coronavirus Pandemic

Cold and flu season has long been an annual event impacting schools, which are tasked with caring for the health and welfare of students and families. The standard process has been to publish and practice good health and safety procedures and to keep children home until a return to good health is established.

However, now we have a novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, which is a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, China, that has now spread to nearly every country. Much is still unknown about the virus with regard to how many have mild or asymptomatic infections and how long they can transmit the virus. The numbers change daily, and the exact dimensions of the pandemic are still difficult to define.

What we do know is that the standard practices in place are no longer strong enough to address and contain the global impact COVID-19 has on every aspect of day-to-day living, including on schools.

Many resources are available to assist churches and schools in caring for their faculty and staff, children and families, and the community. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has made a number of resources available at lcms.org/coronavirus, including a guide called “Congregational Planning for Pandemics.” It’s a place to begin the conversation around strategies to best serve families.

The guidelines are broad in nature to assist congregations in developing plans that best fit the needs of their individual ministries. It is important to remember that handling the spread of a serious contagion like the coronavirus is primarily a task for public health agencies. Any directives from the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and local governmental organizations should be followed. State departments of education and state



early childhood licensing departments are also resources for information regarding the decision to close a school for an extended period.

Our Lutheran schools are independently owned and operated by a church, an association or a Recognized Service Organization. Policies involving school closing and reimbursement of tuition are developed, approved and implemented by the governing authority of the local church and school. Factors to consider when deciding to close involve a review of church and school finances, monies in reserve to cover tuition expenses, compensation of the director and teachers during the closure, and the impact on families.

Additional resources to guide schools through this challenging time are available on LuthEd.org, through the LEA LEADNET Listserv and in the LuthEd Facebook group. Also, LCMS district offices continue to share local and pertinent resources with their schools, so it is important to be included on any district distribution lists that exist.

Together, we join in prayer, firmly believing that whoever “dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust!’” (Ps. 91:1-2).



Computer File



What is Next in Technology: **Data, Data, Data**

Reflect on these two questions related to this month's topic before you read the article to start thinking about how the topic has impacted and continues to impact you, your classroom or your school:

Question #1: What led to this topic's relevance in education? Why was it assigned value in the classroom or implemented in the way it was?

Question #2: How are you using or implementing this topic in your classroom or school at present? If you are not directly interacting with the topic, how is it impacting you in other ways?



If you were to read any of the "top 10" lists that are being written today about what is coming next in education, you would find the concept of data use. While the use of data in education is most certainly not a new concept, the manner in which it will be used looks like it will revolutionize education and learning in the coming years. That may seem like quite a statement, but there is a growing body of evidence that new technologies will drastically change the manner in which data is analyzed and applied to make informed decisions, especially within in the classroom.

To put ourselves in the right frame of mind to reflect on this, we first need

to take a moment to think about how we use data today and how it has been used in the past. If your school is like most current educational institutions, all of the student data that you have is scattered and saved in different locations. It is not compiled in one central location, so it is not impacting student learning.

Before you get defensive, let me explain. Think about the potential data sources generated by a student over the course of a single school year. The possibilities are endless, from individual questions on homework assignments, to work in an online learning program (such as Discovery Education, IXL or Google Classroom), to student-specific standardized



testing results. Take this and apply it to the entirety of a student's time in a school, and you begin to understand how many possible data points there are that both impact and show a single student's educational learning experience. Now, this may seem like an extremely deep dive into the possible data model that makes up a student, but that is exactly the point. The manner in which data is used today to drive learning is superficial in that it only takes into account extremely high-level data points, such as standardized testing, end-of-course exams and date-ranged summations of grades (quarterly report card grades, etc.). Even if these are all used to impact the learning trajectory of a student, more than likely they are still not aggregated in a single system and as such are manually analyzed by teachers or others to develop a plan for student growth. Historically, this was no different, and it's likely even more superficial and dependent on the input of the individual teacher to determine the learning needs of each student. Thus, you can begin to see the immense challenge with data and the manner in which it is used today.

So, where are we going with this? As mentioned earlier, recent advances in technology are exploring new ways to collect, organize, aggregate and display educational information on individual students to ultimately drive effective individualized learning. Imagine for a moment a system that tracks every student's individualized responses for every element of their learning. Such a system would be able to show student mastery of skills, along with the specific areas of learning where additional instruction is needed. The concept of "badges" and mastery-based education begins to work on the resultant display and path for learning, but the data is ultimately what drives these systems. Thus, such a system would be extremely beneficial in showing teachers what needs to be reinforced in real time, as well as year over year in all areas of instruction and learning.

This may not seem so far-fetched if you have ever interacted with a program such as IXL or Duolingo. In each of these online programs, student learning is driven by how they have interacted with review questions in the past. If the data shows that the student is weak in one particular area, additional targeted questions are given to reinforce that specific area prior to moving on. By addressing learning gaps, students are able to have a more complete and targeted instruction path. These two programs are a small glimpse into how such a system could be imagined for student-learning data.

One piece of the puzzle that's needed before moving forward with such a data system is a robust way for machine learning



(artificial intelligence) to work through and organize the many types and pieces of data. Without an automated computer system to speed up the process and detect patterns, the analysis of the data would still be relegated to a teacher or administrator interacting with the system. Until this is available, we would still be in the same place we are today with the only advantage being that we now have the data in one location.

While a single automated and machine learning-driven system for tracking all relevant student data is still a few years down the road, it is up to schools to figure out how best to move forward with data. After seeing where we are going and reflecting on where we currently are, it may seem like a daunting task, but fear not! Steps that can be taken today will go a long way in helping instruction accurately reflect student-learning needs. Make progress on entering all data into an electronic system. Make sure all classes are working off the same standards and assessment schedules. Ensure teachers have time to review data on students both throughout the year and between academic years to facilitate the conversation about continued student growth. These and other data strategies will continue to serve students and schools well until systems and structures are built to ultimately bring all the data together to better facilitate individualized student outcomes.

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A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

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Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS



Special Education Throughout the School Year: April



Along with spring break for your school during this month, April is a time of celebration in our Lutheran schools as we teach students about the death and resurrection of our Lord and the salvation that this brings to us. While certainly taught throughout the rest of the year as well, one lesson that may come up especially around this time is that of grace. Easter is a perfect example of **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. Sometimes, however, showing grace in our classrooms is difficult, particularly with those students who seem to know exactly how to push our buttons. Looking at some challenging student behaviors through a different lens may help us practice this idea of grace in our classrooms.

It is usually pretty easy to look at student behavior and come up with an idea about why the student is acting a certain way. Sometimes these ideas may be correct, but at other times, it's difficult to objectively look at the behavior and figure out the reason behind it. Behavior is communication. This is not always positive communication, but through behavior, students are communicating

something, whether they realize this or not. Undesirable behavior is satisfying some kind of need the student has, and this leads to a response from you and/or other students and adults. Taking a step back and looking at the possible reason for or function of the behavior is the first step in changing behavior.

Behavior typically has one of these functions: escape, attention, tactile or sensory. Students wanting to escape may be trying to avoid a certain task or activity, a certain setting or a certain person in the environment. They may run out of the classroom or setting or act in an undesirable way during a certain time so that they get sent out of the room and do not have to complete that task. Behavior that is related to attention produces attention from a specific person or group of people, and that encourages the students to behave in that way even more. Students interrupting the teacher and making jokes to get everyone in the class to laugh or who want to get in trouble to go see the principal may be looking for this attention. Behavior that serves a tactile function is generally related to the desire for a specific item. For example, pushing classmates out of the way to play with a certain item would meet this function. The sensory aspect of behavior is sometimes embedded within these other three areas, but it represents behavior related to either avoiding or gaining a particular sensory experience. The behavior may mimic behaviors with other functions, but the reason could be different. A student may run out of the crowded and noisy lunchroom because the noise and people overstimulate that student, not because he or she is trying to avoid lunch. Determining the function of behavior may take some time and some trial and error to ascertain, but it is essential to moving forward.



Once the function or reason for the behavior has been determined (or a good guess has been made to start with), a replacement behavior needs to be selected. Replacement behaviors have to serve the same purpose as the original behavior or the undesirable behavior will continue to occur. These behaviors are about meeting the same need but in a more appropriate way. For example, if the student is seeking attention, there needs to be an opportunity for that student to get attention, but only for appropriate behavior. If the behavior intervention and replacement behavior do not result in that student getting attention for something positive, the undesirable behavior that gives him or her attention will continue. It is also important to consider that some students may need to be taught the behavior that is more appropriate. It is easy to assume that students know what the appropriate behavior should be, but many only know what *not* to do. Effective replacement behaviors shift the payoff for students so that the function they seek only occurs for positive behaviors, and there is no payoff for the undesirable behaviors. Initially, there may be an increase in the behaviors you're trying to address as the student learns what will and will not be reinforced. It takes patience and some trial and error, but when the match between function of the behavior and replacement behavior is there, ultimately there will be an increase in

the behavior you want to see and a decrease in the other behavior.

This is a broad overview of the steps of identifying and replacing undesirable behavior, but this ties into God's grace especially during the seasons of Lent and Easter. We should try to extend the same grace to our students by taking time to understand their behavior and come up with appropriate solutions that might require a little more problem solving.



Lutheran Special Education Ministries is happy to help you explore these ideas further and provide suggestions for the behavior challenges you see in your classrooms. Please contact us at lsem@luthsped.org or visit our website at luthsped.org and let us know how we can support you in your ministry!

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A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

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Professionally Speaking



SCRIPTURE: 1 Thess. 5:16–24

Faithfulness

“He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it”
(1 THESS. 5:24).

F **faithful?** It’s not really a concept many people understand or experience. Faithful in marriage? The divorce rate for first marriages is 50 percent and the average age at first marriages is higher now than in the past ([apa.org/topics/divorce](https://www.apa.org/topics/divorce)). Even in a lengthy marriage, faithlessness may be displayed in a variety of sins that impact the relationship.

Faithfulness in terms of loyalty? Brand loyalty used to be a thing. For farmers, Deere versus Case IH. For trucks, Ford versus Chevy. For colas, Pepsi versus Coke. The list goes on.

We experience faithfulness and loyalty, often the lack of these, in our churches and schools. The days have gone when generation after generation maintained membership in a specific church, let alone a denomination. Perpetual church shopping, searching for something, is ongoing (but, of course, that’s better than no connection with a Christian church at all).

But faithfulness is a key part of realizing the blessings of faith in Christ. As the theme verse for this month declares, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 THESS. 5:24). Acting out words with actions is what faithfulness is all about.

The Bible is filled with an ongoing testimony of God’s faithfulness (even as His people were NOT faithful). As an example, consider Abram. Abram is chosen by God (GEN. 12:1) and promised to be a great nation. One of the specific promises was land. God reminds him of this promise already in 12:7. And in 12:10, we watch as



Abram demonstrates his faithlessness by lying about his wife. In 13:14, God again reminds Abram of His promise, His covenant with Abram of land and offspring. This reminder comes as Abram and Lot divided up land for their families’ use.

Jesus’ promises are sure because we know His death and resurrection are sure (1 COR. 15). Jesus was faithful to His words, “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (MARK 8:31). Proven with a variety of resources,

the historical proof of Jesus' death and the empty tomb are catalogued for all to deal with.

We can be confident that if these promises are sure, so is the certainty of other promises from Jesus.

If He says, "I am with you always" (MATT. 28:20), we can be sure we are not alone. If God is with us, this fact surely brings peace and confidence.

If Jesus says, "I will send to you [the Helper]" (JOHN 15:26), we can be sure that the Spirit is working in the hearts of His people.

If Jesus says we are more valuable to Him than lilies and birds, then we can be confident of our daily needs being provided (MATT. 6:25-30).

So, what about our schools? Our schools, though existing in a fallen world with sin-filled leaders, have opportunities to model faithfulness. Though these opportunities are minute compared to the magnitude of the promises that God has and will fulfill through Jesus, our schools do teach faithfulness. Through consistent procedures, safe environments, respectful communication and a presence that is more than academic, Lutheran schools teach faithfulness. When promises are kept, when commitments are honored, when we do what we say, we're demonstrating faithfulness.

Consider the value of discipline or behavior plans for understanding faithfulness. The cause and effect of decisions and actions help teach the basics of faithfulness and dependability. Obedience and honesty are two important parts of any classroom or school behavior expectations. Disobedience and lying hold consequences that encourage better behaviors — behaviors that will help students be trustworthy.

Consider the value of safety for understanding faithfulness. Schools are places of routine, and routines give security. Growing up has much that can be feared. Having routines to cover the day-to-day help us adapt



to the changes that continue to arise. Fire drills and all the other safety drills help grow a sense of security. If daily routines are consistently taught and enforced, students gain security — security that can support the many changes that occur while growing up.

Consider the value of communication for understanding faithfulness. Say what you do, and do what you say. Clearly articulating purpose and mission are big concepts that need demonstration. Teaching from such grounding statements helps teach faithfulness.

Consider the value of presence for understanding faithfulness. Student attendance teaches responsibility and accountability. Punctual attendance also demonstrates dependability. Responsibility, accountability and dependability are key pieces to faithfulness. Teacher attendance demonstrates to students the same things. But teacher attendance at student events (sporting events, fine art events and the like) share a faithfulness deepened to include love and care.

Praise be to God as we can teach the important characteristics of the God who is holy and ever-faithful ... even as He is faithful to us, His lowly servants.

Professionally Speaking // APRIL 2020

A RESOURCE OF LCMS SCHOOL MINISTRY

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