



Alight

FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS



What We Know!

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 PETER 1:6-7).

Fall is a time for seasonal changes such as cooler weather, harvests and being back in school. Students and teachers across the nation are hard at work in Lutheran schools with in-person classes, remote learning and hybrid models. All are adjusting to conditions brought about by COVID-19 as the first quarter is completed. Educators are reflecting on the joys and challenges of a new school year. “It’s so good to be together!” Teachers, students and parents are thrilled to be back and thankful for in-person school experiences.

For many schools, however, an in-person model is not possible. In these cases, schools have adapted to meet the needs of the students they serve by designing curriculum and individualizing teaching methods to accommodate in-person and virtual instruction, in many cases offering both simultaneously. This is not a simple task and it is creating an environment of chronic fatigue for administrators and teachers. Besieged with the complexity of providing multiple platforms, schedules and social distancing requirements, many principals, teachers, students and parents wonder, “How long will this last?” And the answer is, “We don’t know.” Clearly, staying healthy and caring for those who are caring for others is critically important. Consider these suggestions to encourage





colleagues, students and parents to be mindful of the importance of good health:

- › Develop and maintain habits of healthy eating, exercise, time to unwind and getting enough sleep.
- › Limit the amount of time reading or listening to news stories.
- › Reduce the amount of time on social media when feeling overwhelmed or distressed.
- › Talk to trusted individuals about concerns and check in regularly with others.
- › Explore mental health support services available through health plans, in school, and in the school community (concordiaplans.org/wellness.html).
- › Publicize the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline numbers: 800-273-TALK(8255), and in Spanish 888-628-9454.

- › Share facts and information regularly to reduce the spread of misinformation.

Even more importantly:

- › Worship regularly and connect with a church family in person, through “drive-in services” or virtually.
- › Stay connected through individual and small group Bible studies (blogs.lcms.org/2020/bible-study-series-for-covid-19/#stress-resilience).
- › Pray without ceasing.

This is what we do know. We cannot do this alone. God has given us the precious gift of His Son and, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, promises to sustain and to strengthen our faith especially through times of trial and weakness. Throughout the Gospel we see Jesus healing the sick, casting out demons and performing miracles. We follow, even though the mission is hard. While the marathon of the pandemic wears on, we can continue to thrive and take comfort that the Gospel message of hope and the promise of eternal life is the answer that will sustain us through the pandemic and whatever comes our way.

“These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 PETER 1:7).



Computer File



Building Relationships through Technology

How do you get to know someone? If you meet them in person, you can sit down over a cup of coffee or talk at an event to learn more about them. You may find that you have similarities and differences or even play the “Lutheran education” game to see how many shared acquaintances you have as connections! Whatever the case, getting to know someone is simply something that those who work in education do without even thinking.

This is all well and good if you are able to meet and talk face-to-face with someone, but what happens when the only method of communication is through the use of technology? Many people will immediately answer that this adds a level of complexity to building a relationship and that the relationship will not be as “personal” since it is solely developed without face-to-face interaction. Their argument is predicated on the fact that distanced relationship-building is more difficult and less effective than when getting to know someone within physical proximity.

To be honest, relationship-building that is facilitated through technology is nothing new. If you use the true definition of *technology* and apply it in a historical context, mailing a letter, making a long-distance phone call and sending a text were all revolutionary technologies when they were first introduced. Today’s technology of video communication through services such as Zoom, Google Meet and FaceTime is only the next iteration of a long line of technologies that have allowed individuals to interact and build relationships while they are physically apart.



And perhaps that is the most important point. Throughout history, humans have found ways to build relationships using the technology that was available to them. Pen pals who connected via long-form handwritten letters led to friendships that lasted lifetimes. Late night phone calls enabled long-distance relationships to stay connected and grow deeper. Today’s online messaging technologies and video interactions have enabled individuals to connect with others with whom they may have never been able to interact with physically.

It is no different in your classroom today. Teachers and administrators are able to build relationships with students regardless whether they are physically sitting in a classroom or connecting to their learning remotely using technology. The most important point to remember is that it is possible to create deep relationships no matter the medium, so long as you are willing to put in the effort to make it work.

With all of that said, there are some excellent best practices when it comes to developing relationships with students and their families when you are working with them in a remote education setting.

› **Take the Time:** In order to develop effective relationships with students, you need to set aside specific times to connect solely for the purpose of getting to know the student (or family) better. It does not have to be formulaic or scripted — *just talk*. Similar to the conversations you would have at recess or in carline with students, the time you spend intentionally connecting will enable you to learn a little more to build a better relationship.

› **Make it Personal:** Developing relationships in “group format” just does not work. You need to connect one-on-one with a student or family to develop effective relationships, so no all-class Zoom calls. This personal touch works in the same way as sitting down with a friend to chat; it is more intimate and develops the connection between individuals.

› **Write Things Down:** As educators, we have A LOT of information that we deal with on a daily basis, and we may forget some of the little things. Make sure you write things down about students so that you remember them. It does not have to be fancy, but a page in a notebook about your online learners with things like the name of their pet or their favorite fast food helps jog your memory about the student when talking with them. Similar to the “About Me” handouts that teachers do at the beginning of the year (and administrators or Parent Teacher Leagues give to teachers in pre-planning) these little notes will serve as backup for your brain when it comes time to connect.

› **Establish Routines:** In the same fashion as a weekly phone call with a personal friend or family member, establishing a routine to check in with and connect with students and families goes a long way in helping cement deeper relationships. These set check-ins create a sense of routine and normalcy, and, with today’s technology, are able to be scheduled with reminders so everyone is on the same page.

› **Leverage the Technology:** Whatever technology your school is using to facilitate remote or online

learning, learn as much as possible about it in order to find ways to leverage the technology to connect with students and families. If live video is an option, use it. If video messages to students are an option, use them. If notes can be sent via email or text or instant message or chat ... well, you get the idea! Understanding the different ways that a system can be used to connect in order to build a better relationship is essential as not all students will be able to develop a relationship using only one technological communications medium, and some will prefer one method over another. It is on you to figure out what works best for *your students*, even if that means it is not *your* preferred method of connecting.

It is possible to develop effective and long-lasting relationships with students and their families even if they are only connecting to your school using technology. These five best practices should give you some ideas and serve as a starting point as you continue to develop relationships throughout this and future school years.

Remember, at the start of this year’s *Computer File* articles, I issued a challenge. When each month’s article is published, I want you to read through it, find something pertinent to you and your specific situation and then post about it on social media to start a constructive discussion with your peers. As educators we well know that learning only takes place after the internalization of topics and having our thoughts and ideas challenged (or being forced to defend them). Thus, it is essential that we ourselves reflect on, internalize, express our thoughts and have constructive discourse on how the topic will impact our ministry both today and in the future.

Michael J. Rosenfeld, Reuben J. Thomas and Sonia Hausen, “Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 36 (September 2019): 17753–17758, accessed September 8, 2020, [pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1908630116](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908630116).

Logan Beth Fisher, “Connecting With Reluctant Remote Learners,” *EduTopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, August 24, 2020, accessed September 8, 2020, edutopia.org/article/connecting-reluctant-remote-learners.

Susan Yergler, “How to Create Community in a Virtual Classroom,” *EduTopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, August 17, 2020, accessed September 8, 2020, edutopia.org/article/how-create-community-virtual-classroom.

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Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS



Inclusion Strategies: Talking with Your School

As a teacher, administrator or one with another role within our Lutheran school communities, you may fully understand the importance of inclusion from both a biblical and educational perspective. You may be ready for your school to jump in and become a fully inclusive environment in which all students are equal participants and feel that they belong. If your school is already there, or close to being there, that is wonderful! However, for many it is a process that first and foremost requires communication and commitment.

Recently, a principal shared with me a frustration at his school. He is adamant about Matt. 19:14 when Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” He expressed that he clearly views this as Jesus meaning all children, not just certain students who meet certain academic standards. He sees the mission of his school as being able to include as many students as possible, but it has been an uphill battle to get others to feel the same way. He has come to the realization that this is a process that will take time and dedicated effort, but it will be worth the current frustration.

This example emphasizes the reality that not everyone in your school community will automatically see the importance of inclusion or even understand what inclusion looks like. It is useful to help parents, teachers and those in the local community understand and get excited about the steps toward inclusion that your school will be taking. Students may be coming home



from school talking about what “Susie” did in their class today or noting how “Sam” is different. If parents understand the school’s mission in creating an inclusive Christian community, they can have conversations with their child similar to those happening at school. These conversations can continually emphasize that each child is uniquely and purposefully made by our Creator.

Another tip for communication that will help everyone in the school community understand and hopefully get excited about inclusion is to clearly establish and explain how inclusion fits with the school’s mission. This is helpful for school boards, congregations, parents, teachers and other involved in the school. This communication needs to be consistent throughout the year, not just mentioned at back-to-school night or put in the school handbook. Those are great ways to begin to build these discussions, but providing ongoing information



about the inclusive efforts will help others realize the school is not just saying that this is part of their mission but they will see evidence of it as well.

Share stories about how God is working in your school community because of inclusion. These stories can be from teachers, parents and other students (respecting and protecting the privacy of individual students) and shared in newsletters, on the school website and on social media. Make the connection between these examples and how they model elements of the school's mission. Remember that it may be obvious to you in your role at the school, but this does not mean it is obvious to others.

These stories also provide the opportunity to share with those outside the immediate school walls. This could include those in the community who may want to support these efforts financially. Funding is often one of the stumbling blocks to serving more students with disabilities in Christian schools, but individual donors and community foundations may be interested in donating money or specific items needed for students when they see how it is helping the school become more inclusive.

Another way to communicate the importance of inclusion is by having a display in the school entryway or a main hallway. This can include information about inclusion in general, resources on specific disabilities and pictures from classrooms. There are months during the year dedicated to autism awareness and Down syndrome awareness, so the displays can be changed to coordinate with some of these as well. Over time, these displays and stories become part of the fabric of the

school. People in the school community see inclusion as an integral part of the Christian mission, not something that is only done once a year or occasionally during a special unit in class.

This quote from Renee LaPorte can be found on the National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion website: "When someone is truly included, no one will question their presence — only their absence." This goes along with the idea of welcoming all children into the kingdom of heaven. This is the goal of truly inclusive environments where students with disabilities are not only physically present. Communication is a critical piece of getting to that goal and aligning it with the school's mission.



Please reach out to us at lsem@luthsped.org or visit our website at luthsped.org and let us know how we can support your ministry in efforts at inclusion!

"Talking to Kids about Inclusion," National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion, accessed Sept. 28, 2020, fullinclusionforcatholicchools.org/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-inclusion-from-a-catholic-perspective.

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Professionally Speaking



Sent to Serve – With Words

SCRIPTURE: Is. 55:10–12 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Seems like there is more chatter than ever before! Plenty of noise, lots of confusion. Isn't it amazing that with all the resources available for communicating that communication is one of the most perplexing elements of life? One could argue that everyone is talking, but very few people are making sense. Compare comments on social media about masks and one wonders what words to believe and what words are without merit at all.

Besides chatter, very few people are speaking words that are blessing. Rather, it appears that words do more to divide and enrage. Most words are used in an attempt to grab power for one's own interests rather than to affirm and support our neighbor. Think for a moment of all the words being used which are intolerant of God's Law. Words that divide races. Words that divide families. Words that question the truth of marriage. Words that place other things and people above God.

Of course, without hearing God's Word, one can't even comprehend the need for God's Good News of life and salvation in Christ alone. Words matter, and it is only the Word from God that can save and give life.

What are the words that “send” Lutheran schools? Try these words as starting points and consider incorporating them into the written and hidden curriculum of a Lutheran school:



WORDS OF DIRECTION:

› We need to help parents be parents.

- **Practice, practice, practice.** It's not a one-and-done effort. It takes determination. “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (PROV. 22:6).
- **Share family stories.** “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts

of your house and on your gates” (DEUT. 6:6-9). Faith stories are especially important to share — include baptisms, confirmations and weddings — even as this command from God expects His story to be told.

› **Discipline and correct.**

- “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (HEB. 12:11).

WORDS OF ETHICS AND MORALITY:

- › **Teach about life issues** (PSALM 139). As God is the giver of life, we should be sure that life is seen as precious from conception to grave.
- › **Teach about the gift of marriage.** God’s Word is certain on the importance of the institution of marriage. It’s the very picture of marriage that Paul uses to show Christ’s relationship with His Church. We need to get this right!
- › **Teach about the care of one’s body.** It is the temple of the Holy Spirit but is often neglected as God’s gift.

WORDS OF INSTRUCTION:

- › Science is plagued with an ungodly perception. Yet, when science is taught from a biblical perspective, the majesty and providential elements of God come shining through with awe.
- › The beginning of the world, as shared in Genesis 1 and John 1, are core to knowing Jesus.

WORDS THAT EMPOWER THE LONELY AND DESPAIRED:

- › God’s people are chosen for His purpose. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (JER. 29:11).
- › Newness in life is celebrated every day as we remember our baptism. Baptism life means a new day and clean slate — every day.

As every day seems to be forcing change, share words that are unchanging. Share words that remind us to look to Jesus for all we need in this world.

- › **Jesus does not change.** “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (HEB. 13:8).
- › **Before time and into eternity — Jesus.** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (JOHN 1:1).



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