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## School Ministry



# Alight

FOR LUTHERAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND EDUCATORS



## Lutheran School Champions

**L**ast fall we shared the news of our 2019 *National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA)* School Shepherd, Pastor Joseph Cunningham, who serves at St. Peter Lutheran Church and School in North Judson, Ind. Pastor Cunningham was nominated by the NLSA Validation Team at the time of St. Peter Lutheran School's NLSA site visit in Spring 2019. After his nomination was endorsed by LCMS Indiana District officials, a committee of well-respected pastors reviewed each application and prayerfully selected Pastor Cunningham from eight deserving individuals nominated for the award.

In 2015, the Lutheran School Shepherd Award was established by NLSA to honor a faithful pastor who provides outstanding encouragement, support and service to his school. A pastor who is considered for this prestigious award understands and articulates a clear philosophy of Lutheran education and provides spiritual encouragement, guidance and support for the school entrusted to his care. **He is a champion for his school.**

Last month, Pastor Cunningham was presented with the NLSA School Shepherd Award during a service that also celebrated *National Lutheran Schools Week*. The church was filled with families and children. Congregation and community members gave thanks and praise for the ministry of the church and school and for its positive presence in the community. Student choirs sang with great enthusiasm.

Pastor Cunningham expressed his deep appreciation for his work with Principal Rhonda Reimers whose loving care for the children and families is at the heart of the school ministry. He described Miss Reimers as “a dedicated and tireless principal whose gifts shape our non-Lutheran faculty and staff, who supports our shared vision and who embraces the challenges that exist in a rural context.” Pastor Cunningham emphasized that every member of the ministry team is cherished: “We have a dedicated staff of teachers and support staff and delightful children to serve.”

Pastor Cunningham wholeheartedly shared, “This is our mission! I love St. Peter Church and School because God is using it as a vibrant witness of the Gospel and His love for this



And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.<sup>13</sup> (EPH. 4:11–13)

community. Developing a meaningful infrastructure of services and educational opportunities designed to combat poor physical and mental health issues is critical to the overall survival of a rural community. St. Peter is a vital connection to all these initiatives and provides a spiritual connection to these community challenges.” St. Peter Lutheran Church and School is a powerful presence in the North Judson community.

God richly blesses the ministry of Lutheran schools, and Pastor Cunningham joins past recipients of the NLSA School Shepherd Award who also deeply value Christian education.

- 2016 **Pastor Kevin Jud**, Immanuel Lutheran Church and School, Hamilton, Ohio
- 2017 **Pastor Peter Schmidt**, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church and School, Waukesha, Wis.
- 2018 **Pastor Phillip Baerwolf**, Immanuel Lutheran Church and School, East Dundee, Ill.

We give thanks for our faithful school shepherds. God gives us His Son, Jesus, and shares the riches of His grace with us. In turn, Lutheran school champions share the Good News of hope, forgiveness, life and salvation in Jesus with all.



# Computer File



## What is Next in Technology: Assistive Technology

**R**eflect 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 at hand, how is it impacting you in other ways?



When you take a step back to take a hard look at any classroom, it quickly becomes apparent that all students are created differently. This may seem like an extremely obvious statement, but how often do we actually pause and appreciate this fact and the repercussions it has on what assistance each student needs? Students are tall and short, have great eyesight or need glasses, can hear perfectly or need to listen differently, pick up ideas faster or slower, can sit still for hours or need to wiggle continually to focus — the list goes on and on. If you took an inventory of your own classroom or students, you would quickly realize that each and every student has a need that, when filled, allows them to learn more effectively and efficiently.

These needs could be physical, mental, emotional or some other kind that makes all the difference, positively or negatively, in their learning.

In today's technology-filled world, we can meet many of these needs through what the educational industry has termed "assistive technology." Assistive technology has been defined as "providing a means of reducing a physical impairment" (*dictionary.com*). While this definition allows for everyone to have the same understanding, it leaves much open to exploration when actually implementing assistive technologies in the classroom.

Seeing as this definition is extremely broad, especially when looking at how "technology" can be integrated, let's take a closer look at two broad areas and concrete examples for each.

## Physical Assistive Technology

Assistive technology in the physical realm takes many avenues — from personal technology such as hearing aids that interface with computers to classroom technologies like wiggle seats or standing desks. Thus, the list below is certainly not all-inclusive and is only meant to serve as inspiration to get you thinking about what assistive technology could help students in your classroom.

- Students with vision impairments can benefit from assistive technologies such as:
  - Increased font sizes on computer screens, projected text and printed items;
  - Specific fonts for vision impairments such as APHont, OpenDyslexic and Arial; and
  - Screen magnifiers and Text-to-Speech readers (built into most computers and web browsers).
- Students with hearing impairments can benefit from assistive technologies such as:
  - Hearing aids that connect via Bluetooth to computers or other devices projecting sound in the classroom;
  - Assistive Learning Devices (ALDs);
  - Teacher voice amplifiers or classroom microphone amplification; and
  - Visual notifications (lights, signs, etc.) for teacher or school announcements.
- Students with focus challenges can benefit from assistive technologies such as:
  - Fidget cubes or sensory toys; and
  - Active “wobble stools,” wiggle chairs or yoga ball chairs.
- Students with mobility impairments can benefit from assistive technologies such as:
  - Connected desk/chair combinations (Steelcase Node Chair, etc.);
  - Mouth stick, head wand or eye trackers for input interaction;
  - Speech-to-Text software (Dragon NaturallySpeaking, etc.); and
  - Smart speakers for voice control (Amazon Echo, Google Home, etc.).

## Learning Assistive Technology

Assistive technology in the educational realm most often falls into the modern concept of “personalized learning” as implemented by schools today. Structures such as Personalized Learning Plans, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans are often in place to help schools begin to understand the individualized learning environment that is most conducive to a student's learning. From these and other structures, teachers and schools are able to invest in digital technologies that assist multiple students while still providing personalization opportunities for the students that require it. Again, the list below is not all-inclusive but should give a good starting point to get teachers thinking about how this could assist their students' learning.

- **E-Books:** Electronic print books are able to be resized and recolored, and they give many other options that allow for students to read in the easiest manner possible.
- **GSuite for Education and Plug-Ins:** Seamless sharing and adjustments are possible with GSuite and Google Classroom, and the innumerable plug-ins that are available for Google Chrome allow for the ultimate customization of the user experience for students. Any and all modifications can be found by searching for the specific need in question.
- **Virtual Reality Headsets:** The ability to fully immerse students in a safe, controlled, 360-degree virtual environment designed for accessibility allows for a completely customizable experience (eliminating distractions, personalized learning, etc.).

With all of the examples described above, it is apparent that assistive technologies are extremely varied and that new ideas on implementation of everyday “technology” are creating new ways of helping students learn all the time. It is important that we as educators keep an eye out for these new ideas, as they may be the “one small thing” that helps a student learn best in the classroom.

# Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LUTHERAN SCHOOLS



## Special Education Throughout the School Year: March

**Earlier this year in the *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* series**, we discussed providing accommodations for students in your classrooms. Since then, you may have tried a number of these in your setting and kept track of what worked well, what did not work well and what students are still struggling. You may have already gotten to the point of realizing that certain students need more than just accommodations, but you are struggling to know what may be working and what is not. This month, we will look at ideas for progress monitoring and its importance for student success.

Progress monitoring is like wearing a fitness tracker, like Fitbit. Many people wear one around their wrist to become more aware of their activity level and to try to meet a goal for how many steps they have taken in a day. However, if you wear one of these and never look at the information it gives you, should it be a surprise that you are falling behind your daily goals and you don't have an accurate idea of how many steps you really are taking? Sometimes, these devices become fun accessories more than being utilized for their intended purposes. This is similar to progress monitoring in many cases. Teachers have been told to do it by their administrators, a textbook series or the public school district that is evaluating a student, but what purpose does this data actually serve in helping students? Like a fitness monitor, progress monitoring can

provide helpful information, but it requires more than simply giving the assessment.

If your classroom curriculum or practices do not already include progress monitoring tools, look into options such as Acadience Learning (formerly DIBELS), aimsweb or EasyCBM. These three options are efficient and economical. Both Acadience Learning and EasyCBM can be used for free, although there are options that may add some cost, depending on your needs. These measures are all curriculum-based, so their content covers skills that students should learn over the course of a school year rather than covering specific units and chapters. This is ideal for comparing scores from one progress monitoring measure to the next since students are being assessed on similar skills each time. If scores trend upward, you know a student really is progressing and it is not a fluke that they happened to know the material on that one assessment.

A fitness monitor is not very effective at tracking your fitness or steps goals if you only put it on sporadically, or if you do not look at it throughout the day to see where you are in relation to your goal. Likewise, progress monitoring is not effective for showing student growth if the measures are not given consistently and if the data is not reviewed





for individual students. For struggling students, the recommendation is to use progress monitoring for the specific areas of difficulty about twice a month in order to see if students are progressing in those areas. Particularly if the student is receiving targeted intervention for an academic area, it is not helpful to wait too long to see if the intervention is working and resulting in improvement or if the student continues to struggle. If three assessment results in a row do not show progress, it is time for something to change to facilitate success. That is equivalent to the vibration or alert you receive from your fitness monitor telling you that you have been sitting for too long and need to get up and move! Appropriate changes for students who are not making progress may be increasing how often the student is receiving the intervention, how long the intervention is lasting each time or making sure that the intervention is following an evidence-based practice as intended.

The other important consideration for progress monitoring involves tracking the results. Too often, teachers do this activity at home or on the weekends, and students do not consistently get to see their progress. Involve the student in setting goals for each measure based on the recommended score for that grade level, and also have the students graph their progress themselves as they

complete each assessment. It has been shown many times that students are more motivated to improve and make greater academic gains when they are aware of their current performance and have the opportunity to graph their results.

Improving students' academic skills may not be as simple as looking at a fitness monitor and deciding to get out of your chair and move, but the analogy helps emphasize the importance of using data at certain intervals for struggling students.



If you would like further suggestions for how to utilize progress monitoring tools, or how to provide effective interventions for struggling students, please contact us at [lsem@luthsped.org](mailto:lsem@luthsped.org) or visit our website at [luthsped.org](http://luthsped.org).

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# Professionally Speaking



## SCRIPTURE: 1 Thess. 5:16–24

*“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

## Peace

“Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.” — Ronald Reagan

“It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”  
— Eleanor Roosevelt

“Nobody can bring you peace but yourself.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.” — Paul (1 THESS. 5:23)

**A**bility. Work. Self-achieved. God. As the old Sesame Street song goes, “One of these things is not like the others.”

Peace is largely unattainable, yet it is sought in desperate ways. But these quotes address the crux of the issue. Reagan’s desire for peace came in communication, in relationships, in a thoughtful and honest conversation. Roosevelt shared an attitude quite prevalent today: peace starts with believing it is possible but only happens with the individualistic effort of each person. Emerson echoed Roosevelt’s challenge by introspective thought — create peace within yourself so it can happen for all.

But Paul? When we consider our life in Christ, peace is not something that generates from self, but rather it only comes from the source of peace Himself: God.

Stress is a by-product of being a Lutheran school administrator. Being a Christian in an increasingly secular country is also stressful.

An Internet search and some social media interaction occurred, and “Stress and De-Stress: Perspectives on Mind, Body and Spirit” [Sudi Kate Gliebe, *Lutheran*

*Education Journal* 155, no. 3 (2014)] became a direction for March’s *Professionally Speaking* newsletter. Gliebe walks the reader through stress regulation. She speaks to handling emotions. She talks about not dealing with stress from an emotional standpoint. Without getting into great detail, she quotes Garnefski and Kraaij (2007) in identifying the following cognitive emotion regulation strategies: “Self-blame, Other-blame, Acceptance, Catastrophizing, Rumination, Putting



into Perspective, Positive Refocusing, Planning and Positive Reappraisal.” Aren’t we leaders guilty of these strategies?

**Self-blame?** The dedicated, diligent leader is always quick to blame self. We’re taught not to look at others but rather as the Pogo cartoon infamously quotes, “We have met the enemy and he is us” [Walt Kelly (1970)]. We can be our own worst critics. Other-blame? Parent? Board? Teacher? Student? There are plenty of directions for blame to be directed in our less-than-peaceful task of administering a school.

**Acceptance?** “It’s the way it is.” How often we throw our arms up into the air and say, “*c’est la vie*.” After all, we know it’s a sinful world and, on this side of heaven, trouble will be obvious. And “*c’est la vie*” allows for a “devil may care” attitude when things DO fall apart.

**Catastrophizing?** “We’re going to have to cut staff.” “We’ll need to cut benefits to stay open.” “The world just doesn’t want a Christian education.” “If the school closes, what am I going to do?” It doesn’t take much for an administrator to take the position of Elijah and lament (paraphrasing), “I’m done, Lord” (1 KINGS 19:4).

**We teach Christ as the answer.** He is the all in all. In Him is abundant life (JOHN 10:10). We also know, KNOW, that His promises are sure and that peace comes in Christ.

These words from the essay’s summary bear consideration: “Biblical meditation is anchored in the Word of God and stands apart from eastern mindlessness. Indeed, biblical meditation involves disciplining the mind and filling it with Scriptures. Biblical meditation is never passive; it is closely related to Bible reading, prayer and other spiritual disciplines (Whitney, n.d.). Although largely neglected by contemporary believers, Christians from previous generations considered meditation essential to spiritual growth, imperative to withstand pressures and tribulations” (Gliebe, “Stress and De-Stress”).



As Gliebe arrives at meditation for faith and peace, she lists three important parts: thinking, feeling and doing. As she shares this conclusion, she rightly connects a secular definition of meditation with a biblical, Christian application of meditation. Using Paul’s encouragement to consider things that are honorable, pure and lovely (PHIL. 4:8) to control our thoughts would be a breath of fresh air to the challenges of administration. And what about meditation in the affective realm? Bible study and prayer including time to reflect with friends in Christ the ups and downs of life can grow one’s hope, peace and joy in the Lord. Finally, meditation is behavioral — it requires disciplined action. The monastic life of Luther’s time included morning prayer (at daybreak), prime (about 6:00 a.m.), tierce (about 9:00 a.m.), sext (about noon), nones (about 3:00 p.m.), vespers (early evening) and compline (before going to sleep). What is your time for meditation and what do you do? If there isn’t a set time, maybe it’s time to set one up now.

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