

Teachers adjust lesson plans

Distance learning means online lessons and at-home school work

Science, says Robert Barrington, is best taught in person.

But now that the coronavirus necessitated a school closure, Barrington and teachers across Baker School District are moving their lessons to an online platform.

Barrington teaches Honors Chemistry, Honors Physics, and AP Chemistry at Baker High School.

“Physics has been an easier transition due to the topic we’re in,” he said. “It’s pretty easy to have students make a pendulum at home to investigate simple harmonic motion.”

Electricity, on the other hand, may not translate well into distance learning.

“In class we would build a circuit — I don’t think my students’ parents would look kindly if they start rewiring the house,” he said.

Chemistry is another challenge. For the unit on acids and bases, Barrington would normally have students measure pH and study property changes in solutions. But not all students have science supplies at home, so he’s used online simulations.

He worries that without the ability to experiment in the classroom, students may not connect with science as much as they would in a normal school year.

“The hands-on part is where passion is born,” he said. “You rarely hear of a computer simulation that inspired a student. My fear is that I won’t be able to have the same effect on students as I would have otherwise.”

He’ll also miss the experiments with the AP Chemistry students who, after their spring exam, would “do what every beginning chemist wants to do — light stuff on fire and blow things up.”

(They do, he said, still have to explain the reason behind the reactions.)

For Dylan Francesconi, he’s taking this opportunity to hone his skills for



Dylan Francesconi teaches band, percussion, and guitar II at Baker Middle School, and concert and symphonic bands at Baker High School. Here he shows his at-home setup for his distance learning videos.

making and posting videos on YouTube.

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“My approach to online learning has an emphasis on fun and entertainment,” he said. “Part of that comes from my own personal passion for consuming digital media as well as acting.”

He said he’s “crossed from consumer to creator” on YouTube, and is releasing two videos per week.

Rehearsing instruments in a live online class would not work well, he said, due to poor sound quality and lag time in Internet connections.

Instead, he sees the live classes as more of a hang out time.

“One thing that’s severely lacking in everybody’s lives is socialization,” he said. “I will open up a Google Meet, hang out for a little while so people can trickle in, then share my screen and play my video for that day.”

At South Baker Intermediate School, the sixth-grade team created a schedule to target standards and objectives they want students to meet by the end of the year.

“Each teacher is taking care of different assignments and tasks, then we all help review and make changes and suggestions where needed,” Jonathan Baer said.

Cynthia Stevens and Allison Brown prepare math, and Kelly Hood sends weekly schedules to parents.

Hood and Baer work on the weekly newsletters, and Baer and Angie Hays record themselves reading books for the students. Hays also works on the English Language Arts curriculum.

“Switching to this online/distance learning format presents its own set of challenges we’re all learning to overcome,” Baer said. “I personally would rather be in the classroom face-to-face with my students.”

Ashley Ballard, a third-grade teacher at Brooklyn Primary School, said administrators helped the transition to distance learning by creating a shared drive of resources to ensure families across grade levels received similar structure to weekly packets.

She said the third-grade team of teachers divided subjects to gather activities for the packets to be sent home.

“Our team has been collaborating on everything we’re doing,” Ballard said.

In the first few weeks, packets reviewed skills covered in third grade before school was canceled. By the last week in April, those packets — and the recorded lessons from teachers shared through Google Classroom — transitioned to the new subjects of division and fairy tale writing.

“We teach every subject, every day, in hopes of providing the best distance education opportunity possible,” Ballard said.

Teachers across the district have instituted weekly phone calls to parents, and continue to connect through ParentSquare.

“All of this could not have happened without the solid collaboration from everyone,” Ballard said.

But there is one thing missing from this new platform: time with students.

“We miss our students so much,” she said. “It’s weird to teach to a camera.”