



# KEYSTONE CONNECTIONS

## From the Desk of Steve Farmer

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Greetings to all!

I truly hope this finds you all healthy and safe.

March 13, 2020 seems like a distant memory as we busily worked to get Distance Learning up and running. Five weeks flew by and here we are -- engaged in teaching and learning! I am very proud to see how quickly everybody stepped up and got things done. Additionally, online training for staff is now ongoing.

As you can see, we are starting up our Keystone Connections again.

Over the past few weeks, the administrators have worked hard to ensure our Distance Learning delivery is up and running. Additionally, we discussed providing support not only for our students and their families, but for our faculty and staff (aka YOU). Within each KC issue, you will find section(s) related to self-care for our staff. We have assembled a "COVID wellness committee" consisting of 4 staff members (two staff members from WPSD and two from SSDHHC) to come up with tips and ideas to support you and your families during this crisis. Be looking for these ideas within the KC each week, starting next week. The HR department will be including information about the Employee Assistance Program and other benefits we offer that you can take advantage of.

This morning, we held our first "COVID Team Meeting." We will be meeting three times a week to discuss issues that have arisen as a result of this pandemic and the impact they may have on the organization. The members of this team are academics, Children's Center/Early Intervention, facilities, residential, health center, housekeeping/maintenance, DIA, business, HR, security, and IT department heads throughout the organization. The meeting was extremely productive. Overall, I heard positive things about our faculty and staff and how everybody is hanging in there and working hard. Keep up the good work!

Additionally, during this meeting, it was brought to my attention that John Moser has been hard at work addressing numerous technology requests and issues. Your patience is appreciated.

Hang in there. Please know that we appreciate all you do. Stay safe and healthy!

---Steve

## Notes from Scranton

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These past few weeks have been indescribable as everyone responded like the heroes they are and pivoted from a bricks and mortar focus of instruction to one that is cyber in nature and relies on a variety of platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, See Saw, BrainPop, and so on. If you had been given a test and asked what each of these mean five weeks ago, I would bet you may understand the first one, respond that Zoom is a show from the 70s, See Saw is a playground item, and BrainPop is the ASL sign for your head exploding.

Five weeks later, we are all the wiser and now understand that Google Classroom is an extremely powerful way to connect with our students and provide a unique learning experience. We also know that Zoom is the runaway video conferencing platform of choice for the world-at-large, See Saw is an electronic means for communicating with parents and sharing student portfolios, and BrainPop is an animated educational site for students.

I am amazed by how each of you pivoted in order to provide the best instructional experiences for our students. I had the opportunity to see the work being done in Google Classrooms, visit a preschool circle time activity with the Hershey Preschool, meet with teachers from the Programs of WPSD as they came together in mutual support to set up educational platforms so teaching and learning could go on. During these past few weeks, I have been filled with pride as I see paraprofessional aides at SSDHHC work with their teachers in supporting students and participating in live activities. I see the levels of collaboration between administrators and teachers from all sites grow in order to work through some of the hurdles this shift to online learning has caused.

This past Friday I had the opportunity to visit the school. It is as we left it. St. Patrick's decorations everywhere. Teaching materials ready for the start of the following week. A school isn't just a building. The Scranton School is the people who comprise it. The students, families, and staff are SSDHHC.

Let's keep the good work going.

---Kevin McDonough

## **From the CECO's Corner**

I hope this "COVID19" edition of the Keystone Connections finds you safe and healthy - we are living in surreal times! I tell people that my life is not that different in some ways, but it's a different world in other ways! I remind myself that it was MY idea to move here alone eight years ago. I am definitely glad that I got a dog in January - Milo's been great company (except when he ate my Fitbit and a pair of Haviana flip flops in the same day!). Also, being the "resident tourist," this quarantine has really cramped my style! I can't wait to start exploring the local area again!

I've been working via webinar, Zoom meetings, and email, so that part isn't that much different, either. The one thing that is very different, however, is there is absolutely NO TRAVEL - so unusual. I've attended a couple of legal webinars, including one that was four hours long - and very interesting! Our interpreting requests have gotten much less, and the actual interpreters have moved online - even into IEP meetings. Thank you to Josh Waltherhouse for helping with this, as well.

We've spent a lot of time building our Public School WORKS online training plans and database. A team of us all pitched in to the same Google Doc, in addition to a couple of marathon Google Meetings, and came out with a pretty good database! A lot went into it, so that hopefully you will get a lot out of it! We had researched online training systems back in the fall, when working on a Safety Grant, and therefore had the information ready - we just had to reconnect, sign on the dotted line, develop an organizational training plan and get started. We will also be able to customize the trainings. As of Friday afternoon, 77/246 have finished all of their trainings!

The residential staff have been busy - Deans Ennis-Blahut and Halik cleaned out all of the pods' refrigerators and food early in the quarantine. They've met with me regularly and they and the residential staff have communicated with parents and students. We reviewed online trainings, the deans and I developed four Google Forms trainings for residential and paraprofessionals at all of the Programs of WPSD, and had an all staff Zoom meeting on Thursday, April 16th. It was so good to SEE everyone! We are making plans to pack, store, or deliver residential students' belongings that were left here.

Teachers and administrators have been very busy fulfilling the Continuity of Education Plan, which is posted under "Academics" on both the WPSD and SSDHHC Websites. I was proud to pass that along to both ERCHL (Educational Resources for Children with Hearing Loss) and the Statewide Supervisors. Thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to continue the educational experiences of our students. There are many more plans and decisions to make, and I am sure that we will make them all with our students' best interests in mind. Stay safe and healthy, all.

---Marybeth Lauderdale

## **From the Academic Team**

It is difficult to believe that our students have not been on campus since March 13th. Since that Friday, we have seen so many extraordinary things happen across our organization as we have set up and transitioned to a distance learning model. Indeed, the creative and collaborative ways that staff have established to meet this challenge have been impressive and may continue even after the COVID-19 pandemic recedes. Although we all would love for schools to re-open and for our students to return to campus as quickly as possible, your dedication to making the best out of a bad situation and to implementing distance learning without sacrificing the quality education that our students deserve has been inspiring.

Over the remaining weeks, research says that we can expect students and families to grow weary with distance learning. It will be important to continue to find ways to engage with them and to keep levels of participation high. Support them as they do their best to juggle their personal lives with their unexpected role as home school teachers. Continue to communicate with them. Share resources. Clearly explain what your expectations are. Be a source of strength and calm to many of our students and families.

In addition, research indicates that staff will grow tired with the demands of distance learning. We need to find ways to engage with one another and to keep spirits high. Support one another as we all do our best to juggle our personal lives while working from home. Continue to communicate with one another. Share ideas about how you are successfully delivering remote instruction. Check on them, their families, and friends. Be a source of strength and calm for one another.

Again, we want to extend our sincerest thank you to everyone for all of the time, effort, and patience that you have put into the planning and preparation of transitioning to a distance learning model. Your commitment to our students, to our families, and to one another has been exemplary and is yet another example of why WPSD is such an amazing organization.

**From the Human Resources/Payroll Departments:**

During all of these uncertain times, please know that we are wishing you and your family health and safety during these unique times. Please continue to stay safe and healthy and try to find the positives in every day. We are hopeful that we will see you all soon!

**DELAYED: Voluntary Life Insurance**

Please know that we are delaying our optional and additional life insurance for staff to purchase for themselves, their spouse, and dependent children (up to age 19, 23 if enrolled in college/university), until September 1, 2020. The reason for the delay and postponement is the insurance company requires that 20% of our staff to participate in voluntary insurance to ensure the coverage AND rates. Because of this, we felt it best to wait until we all returned to offer this benefit. Please know that the insurance company will be providing us with new enrollment forms at that time.

**ADP:**

Please know that we are reviewing all staffs' Request for Leave Forms that have been submitted after March 13, 2020. We will be following up, via email, with you individually to communicate to you that we have removed your time off request. When you have an opportunity, please check your time off in ADP, and let me know if you have any questions/concerns regarding the information listed in your time off. We will be happy to work with you.

Please know that the Administrative Team is discussing options on how to handle any unused vacation, personal, and sick days that were not used during this school year. As soon as a decision has been made, we will make sure to communicate to all staff.

**Payroll:**

If you need to make any changes to your banking information for direct deposits, please email Barb Hancock or Dori Bachar and we will want to follow up with you through a phone conversation due to the increased concerns of on-line fraud.

**Employment Opportunities:**

During distance learning and working remotely, we will be continuing to interview applicants for our open positions via Google Meeting or Zoom Meetings. Our open positions are as follows:

*WPSD Positions:* Teacher, One-on-One Teacher's Aide position (Children's Center), Housekeeper, Summer maintenance positions - 2 Painters and 4 Laborers; Part-time Audiologist, and Substitute Positions: Teachers, Teacher's Aide, and Security.

*SSDHHC Positions:* Substitute positions: Teacher, Teacher's Aide, Nurse and Security.

*Hershey Positions:* Part-time SLP

**\*\*Reminder:** Any employees interested in applying for a posted position should complete an internal application, signed by their immediate supervisor, attach an updated resume/application, and forward to the Human Resources Department.

**An Evening in Edgewood RESCHEDULED!**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Evening in Edgewood event that was originally scheduled for March 27 has been rescheduled for Friday, June 12. The Department remains hopeful that we will be able to gather together again and celebrate the students and work of WPSD at this fun event. Thank you to everyone who has purchased tickets or sponsorships or made a donation so far; we appreciate your support of our students and look forward to gathering with you when it is safe to do so again.

*---Institutional Advancement*

**Virtual Staff Lounge**

Social Distancing certainly does not mean Social Media Distancing! In a time of separation and quarantine, Scranton School for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children has chosen to use social media to stay together and connected. Through recognizing the need for togetherness, staff created a virtual lounge where they can chat, share ideas and motivation, and ask questions. Scranton's staff has participated in weekly photo challenges within the lounge to keep each other connected about their new work lives. While this is not the same as everyday face-to-face conversation, it has certainly kept school spirit and staff motivation on the rise. The staff lounge has become a place of positivity, fun, and relief in this ever-changing, chaotic time. The staff lounge has been an excellent reminder of the strong support system Scranton's staff is to each other, and that we truly are stronger together - even when we are apart.

**SSDHHC Online Learning Staff Photo Challenge:**

*Monday* - a photo, GIF, or meme that describes how you're feeling about starting online learning

*Tuesday* - a photo of your "coworkers" (your family, roommates, pets, plants, etc.)

*Wednesday* - A photo of how you are practicing self-care (your cup of coffee, evening walk, TV show you are binging)

*Thursday* - A photo of your "office" (the space where you are working)

*Friday* - A photo of you wearing your SSDHHC gear to show school pride

*---Jacqueline Bailey*