**What will school look like this fall?**

**April 7, 2020 Dr. Tim’s Blog**

**We’ve all been improvising our leadership these days. We’ve been called up on stage, thrown a scenario, and asked to respond quickly. Our lives have turned upside down and we’ve had to make up new rules, expectations, and routines. Our teachers have created a new way of delivering instruction and connecting with students while managing their own newly chaotic homes. Our school leaders have been trying to manage a virtual school environment, making sure that every student is challenged and cared for while becoming conversant in cash flow projections, new HR laws, SBA loans, and many, many more. The level of anxiety and stress is palpable. In a crisis such as this one, our day-to-day needs can take precedence and we can spend our time only reacting to questions and simply putting out fires.**

**But this is exactly the right time to be strategic. I was inspired by this Knowledge at Wharton article “It’s your leadership moment.” But where to begin? Start here—we have three horizons to worry about: the next eight weeks, the next eight months, and the next eight years. We can assume that most schools will not be re-opened in the next eight weeks so we’ll need to plan accordingly. And it feels to soon to worry about eight years from now. So let’s focus on the next eight months.**

**Start with what we don’t know. We don’t know if the pandemic is going to subside over the summer. We can expect it will come back but we don’t know how. Many people are assuming that the coronavirus will act like the seasonal flu—meaning that once a person has recovered they cannot suffer from it again and it will disappear in the summer months. But we don’t know that. The virus is spreading in the Southern hemisphere, showing that it has virulence in the summer. And we are hearing reports of people infected more than once.**

**We know that a vaccine is still more than a year away. While treatment might become more effective and systematic, the virus is poised to continue spreading over the next two years. The director of the CDC mentioned “24 months” last week and that was the first time I had seen that number used. We know that the virus is easily spread so masks are now part of the recommendation.**

**So we can assume that the virus is going to be disrupting out lives in some form for the next eight months. Therefore, three paths are available:**

1. **We can reopen schools and public events due to fatigue or worry about the economy. We might tire of “flattening the curve” and accept that it’s time for everyone to be exposed. We can assume there would be an overwhelm of our medical resources and a significant loss of life. We can assume this isn’t going to happen, especially not during an election year.**
2. **We can keep schools closed and continue remote learning. We’re finding that the capacity of districts and families to carry out effective remote learning is limited. We can also assume that people will lose enthusiasm for remote learning (if they had any to begin with). And I think, frankly, we all miss the face to face connection. But this remains a possibility for this fall.**
3. **We can attempt a hybrid model. If we wanted to prevent community spread but bring students back for some face-to-face instruction, considerations:**
4. **We might have to require students to wear masks at all times**
5. **We probably wouldn’t have any athletics, club meetings, or gatherings.**
6. **We probably wouldn’t have PE, band, and other electives that involve physical activity in enclosed spaces where masks couldn’t be worn.**
7. **We probably wouldn’t allow visitors into the building.**
8. **We might have to enforce social distancing. A teacher might only be able to have 6-7 students in a typical classroom. We might have to go to school in shifts.**
9. **We might have to convert our larger spaces (gyms, cafeterias, libraries) into super-sized classrooms.**
10. **We’d have to rethink teacher-student interactions. Can they meet one-on-one in a space closer than six feet? If so, how do we protect the teachers?**

**Does this all sound alarmist? Unrealistic? Well…stop for a minute and take stock of how different our lives are than one month ago.**

**We need to begin imagining how we could reallocate our space, rework our daily schedule, reassign our student course requirements. If a hybrid model takes root, we need to identify how much, how often, in what way, etc.**

**It’s also possible that we are allowed to reopen schools if certain criteria are met (no new cases in the county for a week, for instance) and then are immediately closed for a period of time when a new case arises. If that’s the case, then we still need to imagine our instruction as hybrid so we can toggle back and forth this fall.**

**We’ve all been caught off guard this spring and have had to react and improvise. It’s time to begin practicing our lines for this fall’s production and rehearsing our approaches so we can become the educational leaders we’ve been trained to be.**