

## Press Clippings 04/28/20

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### You can learn math and English online, but how about pottery? Hands-on education challenged after COVID-19 closes schools

By: John Keilman



Veronika Pesovic creates a three layer vanilla and strawberry cake at her home on April 24, 2020, in Grayslake. She's taking Patisserie 2 class at College of Lake County and is baking at home because the campus is closed. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

Veronika Pesovic's sponge cake looked and tasted fine, but she knew something was off. It was denser than it should have been, and she wasn't sure how it ended up that way. Were the egg whites whipped properly? Was the oven too hot, or not hot enough?

Had the aspiring pastry chef been in her classroom at the College of Lake County, where she is enrolled in a patisserie course, she could have asked her teacher on the spot. But the campus is closed and Pesovic is confined to her Grayslake home, continuing her education in her own kitchen.

"A big part of baking is how things look and how they feel," she said. "We're still learning how heavy a batter should look, what temperature something has to be. When we're in class, a lot of what I do is ask, 'Chef, does this look all right?' Not having that guidance on site is what I would consider the most difficult part of it."

As students and teachers across Illinois continue to adjust to the long-distance education prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning curve has been steepest for those in hands-on courses, where classroom conditions are impossible to simulate via email or video chats.

That has forced educators and learners alike to become more resourceful and innovative, though in some cases, there is no substitute for what was left behind when their schools closed.

“They can read about it, but to be in a kitchen with a professional chef showing them what can go wrong, other ways to make their pastry or desserts, that part of it is missing,” said Pesovic’s teacher, baking and pastry instructor Teresa Novinska. “More of them are making more mistakes that I probably could have caught.”

She has tried to adjust by demonstrating techniques on Zoom and encouraging students to send photos and written summaries of the final result. But some recipes are no longer doable because of the specialized equipment or uncommon ingredients required, she said.

Joe Dusa, who is enrolled in Novinska’s chocolate and confections class, said he is now making his own ingredients, visiting websites to learn how to create inverted sugar and glucose syrup.

“If I’m given a challenge, I will try to find the answer,” said Dusa, who lives in Lake Villa. “You go online, you read directions, and if it doesn’t work out the first time, you do it again.”

Such inventiveness has been essential for students trying to make the best of a bad situation. In the engineering class Joe Morales teaches at Bartlett High School, students were one week away from finishing their prototypes in a yearlong project when school closed.

Most were out of luck, their go-karts or air hockey tables put on hold for lack of proper equipment at home — “Only one student out of 150 had access to welding equipment,” Morales said — but seniors Garima Shah and Pooja Patel were determined to finish their creation: a pair of light-up high heels whose illumination is controlled by a cellphone.

The original plan was to attach the lights to the heels, but since neither had access to a soldering iron, they decided to wrap the lights around the sole and hide the electronics in a case tucked discreetly onto the shank.

“In a way, an upside was that we had to learn to think on our feet and problem solve,” Shah said. “We had to adapt and find a way to get it done.”

But adaptability can go only so far. Sean Murrin’s automotive classes at Buffalo Grove High School have had to switch to webinars and online training modules since students no longer have access to a garage. Murrin said that could be a drawback for kids seeking to get professional certification right out of high school, though most of his seniors plan to continue their education in college or trade school.

He said it’s unfair to require students to work on vehicles on their own, since many don’t have the necessary tools or even a car. But some, he noted, have taken that task upon themselves.

“The kids who like working on their cars, it doesn’t matter if there’s 10 feet of snow or COVID-19,” he said. “They’re gear heads. Nothing’s going to stop them.”

Case in point is Brandon Bowers, a Buffalo Grove junior. He has put custom rims and rear struts on his brother’s Toyota and new sway bars on his dad’s Mercedes.

“Getting under the car isn’t easy (without a professional lift), but otherwise it’s been fairly easy for me,” he said. “It’s not my first time doing it at home.”

When it comes to learning to drive a car, though, some limits can't be overcome through ingenuity.



Brandon Bowers, 17, a junior at Buffalo Grove High School, switches out the sway bar links on his dad's car at home in his garage on April 23, 2020. Bowers is completing the work required for his auto diagnostics class on his father's 2011 Mercedes-Benz. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)



Buffalo Grove High School junior Brandon Bowers, 17, works on his dad's Mercedes-Benz in his family's Buffalo Grove garage on April 23, 2020. He's doing work required for his auto diagnostics class. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

The state requires 30 hours of classroom instruction and six hours of road time in driver's education courses. While schools can continue with online learning, students must wait to finish their time behind the wheel until the government says it's safe, said Brent Johnston of the Illinois High School and College Driver Education Association.

He said with up to 60,000 high school students taking the class every semester, along with another 10,000 to 15,000 who enroll over the summer, Illinois could see a glut of students needing road time and not enough instructors. His organization is asking the state for permission to allow retired teachers to provide that instruction in the summer and fall.

But Johnston said the loss of classroom time might be a greater issue. He said he uses in-person meetings to impress the importance of safety upon his students, sometimes bringing in guest speakers who have been injured in crashes.

“I teach kids how to drive behind the wheel, but I teach kids how to stay alive in the classroom,” he said.

The stakes aren't quite so high for Marla Seibold, who teaches art at Evanston Township High School, but she, too, is operating in less than ideal conditions. She was able to supply her painting students before school closed, but those learning ceramics weren't so lucky; without clay and other materials, they are planning their projects rather than actually executing them.

Her Advanced Placement students, meanwhile, are essentially done with the portfolios they've worked on all year, and which can earn them college credit if a panel of educators score them high enough. But they're still disappointed with how their senior year turned out, Seibold said, and generally conduct their Zoom conferences glumly wrapped in blankets.

“It's better to be with our students,” she said. “This is not a replacement at all, in any way, shape or form.”

**---Daily Herald---04/28/2020**  
**How schools are preparing for fall**  
**By: Madhu Krishnamurthy**



Nine-year-old Evelyn, left, and Charlotte Jackle, who are in Mrs. Siegwarth's third grade dual language classroom at Otter Creek Elementary School in Elgin, take advantage of “flexible seating” during distance learning.



Sara Sadat, standing, oversees her children's e-learning at the family's Lisle home. Her children from left are, Zoya Shaik, 13, Myra Shaik, 7, and Yunus Shaik, 11. Schools across the suburbs simultaneously are planning for e-learning and school reopening in the fall.



Dana Hall of Naperville works with her 11-year-old son Keller, left, who is severely autistic and nonverbal and normally attends an out-of-district therapeutic day school. Her younger son Grady, 8, works on an e-learning assignment on the right. Suburban schools are planning for continuing e-learning in the fall.

Uncertain over whether students will return to classrooms this fall or continue virtual learning from home, some suburban school leaders say they are working on contingency plans for next year.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker during a weekend COVID-19 briefing said educators should plan for both when the 2020-21 school year begins.

Many schools, even some with technological challenges, nimbly adapted to remote learning after Pritzker's stay-at-home order took effect on March 21.

"All our plans are being developed (and adjusted) so that we are prepared in the event distance learning is required again next year," said Tony Sanders, superintendent of Elgin Area School District U-46.

U-46 was not equipped to provide e-learning for its nearly 38,400 students when Pritzker issued the original order. The state's second-largest school district cobbled together a distance learning plan in collaboration with teachers, utilizing roughly 26,000 Chromebook devices issued to students in fifth through 12th grades and deploying 5,800 communal devices.

Sanders said the district will continue training teachers through the summer on the new learning platform software that allows remote instruction and will acquire additional technology so every student has a device in the fall.

Northwest Suburban High School District 214 spokesman Dave Beery said officials there still are working on altering previously set spring and summer plans.

"Our immediate focus remains primarily on finalizing those changes and ensuring the best possible outcomes and experiences in a challenging situation for all of our students and families," he said.

While Naperville Unit District 203 officials say they are preparing for all eventualities, they have not outlined a plan for next school year.

"Right now, we are focusing on finishing the year strong with remote learning and what our summer learning may look like for those students interested," spokeswoman Sinikka Mondini said.

If schools do reopen in the fall, they might look very different from before, as officials consider imposing safeguards, such as requiring face masks, taking students' temperature daily before they enter school and possibly limiting attendance.

Stevenson High School District 125 officials are considering split schedules or alternating-day schedules to accommodate the 4,400 students expected to enroll this fall.

"It's all going to come down to the Illinois State Board of Education guidance," spokesman Jim Conrey said. "We are trying to do the best we can to map out potential scenarios that might develop in the fall. We're going to be ready for anything. We just hope the guidance can come sooner rather than later so we can do the preparation on our end."

Stevenson students are well equipped for e-learning with district-issued iPads. But the bigger challenge for it and most school districts will be securing enough face masks for all students, Conrey said.

With e-learning, educators so far have been focused on maintaining what students already know as opposed to teaching new curriculum.

It's working as well as can be expected but is no substitute for in-person instruction, said Donn Mendoza, superintendent of Round Lake Area Unit 116.

The district's nearly 7,200 students transitioned to e-learning seamlessly with sixth- through 12th-graders already issued personal devices and an additional 3,000 devices deployed for elementary students.

"If (e-learning) goes well into the fall, obviously what is normal is going to continue to shift and change and this is kind of the reality that we are in right now," Mendoza said. "Every school district is going to have to think how to improve (students). We're planning for every contingency. We need to be prepared to pivot in whatever direction we end up."