

From: Downs, Meghan <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 4/23/2020 11:27:15 AM
To: Jason Golden <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Gary Anderson <[REDACTED]>; Nancy Garrett <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: How can we help WCS lead?

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We need to be getting creative right now. Innovating. Leading the way – just like Williamson County Schools always has. And yet it feels like we're holding ourselves back, while trying to work within perceived constraints.

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So my question is, how can *we* help? How can the community come together and partner with you? How can we find solutions for our students who don't have internet access? How can we secure additional technology resources to help bridge our existing gap? How can we partner with businesses who are quickly, and in many cases successfully, shifting thousands of employees to remote working, while leveraging easy-to-use technology that schools can also be using?

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We know that there are areas where we can improve through the rest of this school year. Thank you for your advice on both district communication and that gap you experienced with College Grove. We continue to work on communicating in different venues so that every parent receives that communication in a way they can best receive it. Based on my conversation with Nancy, I understand that this is within your professional expertise, so we appreciate that you certainly recognize there are ways for us to improve.

We are also doing strategic planning for next year. At our last Board meeting, we committed to have a more comprehensive virtual program ready for the fall in the event schools have to close again. Ultimately, we're convinced that there is no 100% substitute for classroom instruction, but our experience with much increased use of online platforms through this Spring is helping open up for our teachers the value of these tools. Our professional development plan for teachers has already shifted to increase its emphasis on these tools. Likewise, our strategic planning related to distance learning has gotten a boost with this event. One piece of good that I'm convinced will come from this bad event is that distance learning tools will be used much more in the district in those areas where they work well.

I'm cc'ing Denise Goodwin and Carol Birdsong, our leaders in elementary schools and communication, respectively, so they are aware of this conversation as they continue to work to serve students and parents.

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From: Downs, Meghan
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2020 5:53 PM
To: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: How can we help WCS lead?

As a parent of two Williamson County Schools students, thank you for everything you are doing to 1) help students in the community who need food assistance, 2) address employee-related questions and concerns, and 3) begin implementing disaster-preparedness learning plans/develop learning plans for the 40,000+ students in our area. I recognize that you are working tirelessly, this situation is hitting you on multiple fronts, and you are likely being inundated with a million (differing) opinions as to how learning should continue during this time.

I truly appreciate everything you are doing right now, but I also question if it's enough (not for lack of trying!) and what the community can/should be doing to help (albeit remotely) during this time of need?

Leading the Way

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I fully recognize that these are *real* challenges and the answers aren't easy, but we've got to figure out how to rise above them. It simply is not enough to provide families with a list of online resources (which, by the way, excludes the very learners we're being told would be excluded if we were to implement online learning) without even giving them the context of what content their students should be focused on. Further, it seems like a LOT of school systems across the country – even systems in impoverished areas – are figuring this out faster than we are.

How can we help?

So my question is, how can we help? How can the community come together and partner with you? How can we find solutions for our students who don't have internet access? How can we secure additional technology resources to help bridge our existing gap? How can we partner with businesses who are quickly, and in many cases successfully, shifting thousands of employees to remote working, while leveraging easy-to-use technology that schools can also be using?

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But I think we're all realizing that we are not going back to school on April 6. So how can we help you continue to provide a first-rate public-school education for our children in the face of this ongoing pandemic?

Thank you,
Meghan Downs
(Mother of [REDACTED])

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From: Nancy Garrett <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 4/23/2020 12:19:56 PM
To: Jason Golden <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Gary Anderson <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: How can we help WCS lead?

FYI: Professionally, Megan is a subject matter expert in leadership- and crisis-communications. In a phone call she and I had after her last email, she did offer her professional expertise and help if wanted some external advice.

Nancy

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From: Downs, Meghan <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, April 23, 2020 11:27:15 AM
To: Jason Golden <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Gary Anderson <[REDACTED]>; Nancy Garrett <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: How can we help WCS lead?

WARNING: EXTERNAL EMAIL - Do not click on links or attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Mr. Golden – I originally reached out via my previous email, exactly one month ago. Since that time we’ve received grade-specific packets, Chromebooks have been distributed to students needing them, teachers have begun more regular communication with students, and as of this week, my middle school student is now participating in daily Zoom sessions (one session per course per week).

It’s progress, and I very much appreciate everything that has gone in to moving these items (and countless others, I’m sure) forward. Thank you for everything you are doing in these unprecedented times.

That said, I want to be very honest with you – I remain frustrated and disappointed with our school system and how we are adapting/responding on a number of fronts:

1. **Speed:** We remain behind other school systems around us, playing catch up, e.g., it is FANTASTIC we are Zooming, but other systems implemented online learning weeks ahead of us. And our elementary students STILL aren’t being permitted to Zoom with teachers and their classmates. While I appreciate planning and thoughtful decision making, we also need to move with some speed and efficiency. I am not sure why things are taking so much longer to implement in WCS than in other schools, but I can’t help but wonder if we are being too risk-adverse. **Why is it taking us weeks to adapt and innovate, in even relatively simple ways?**
2. **District-Wide Communications:** It has been some time since we’ve heard from the administration, and while I am THRILLED that we are hearing more and more from our principals and teachers at this point (they are PHENOMENAL!), there are still some messages I should be hearing from the district. Why, for example, when the district made the decision to move to Zoom opportunities for middle and high school was there not a district-wide message explaining the holistic plan for all schools? When I heard from Page Middle, I was very excited to get the Zoom message and made the (incorrect) assumption that I’d shortly be getting the same message from College Grove, only to be disappointed. **I’m sure there are plans in place – why aren’t they being communicated?**
3. **Teachers on the front lines:** Let me be incredibly clear here – my students’ teachers are FANTASTIC, and have been every single year we have been in this system. It is crystal clear to me that our teachers are being held back for some reason. Interaction with our teachers has increased – which is very much appreciated – especially at the middle school level. But at the elementary schools, it’s simply not enough. It is obvious that our teachers’ every actions are being controlled – from the form letters they are permitted to distribute to the once-a-week video that a single teacher in a grade is sending out on behalf of the team of teachers. **Why are our teachers being held back? They are phenomenal; let them interact with their specific students.**
4. **Forward-looking plans:** And finally, I have no sense that there is any sort of planning for the future. Perhaps this comment isn’t yet fair, given we’re still in the midst of responding to closures this Spring, but I hope you are already beginning to think about the future and will be communicating plans with parent over the summer. What is the plan for the fall if, heaven forbid, schools need to remain closed? What are your plans for

intermittent periods of closures if required due to localized spikes? What are your plans for instituting social distancing measures at our schools if/when necessary? I recognize there will likely be guidance coming from the state that you'll need to adhere to, but I also trust that 1) such guidance will likely be too little and will clearly be too late, and 2) we have the best of the best in WCS, so our teachers/administration should be taking a lead with the state to influence outcomes for the future. So what is WCS doing to think about the future and LEAD on behalf of our students and, perhaps, the students of all of TN as well? **What are our disaster preparedness plans moving forward?**

I am a firm believer and supporter in a public school education for countless reasons, and I have never considered sending my children to a private school. I am realizing now, that I have been blessed to have access to the best-of-the-best when it comes to public schools, so I've never needed to question my decisions. I sincerely hope that I won't be in a position to have to question my decisions in the fall. I sincerely hope our district is able to recover, innovate, and ultimately thrive in the face of this challenge.

Thank you, again, for your time and for your tireless work on behalf of our students,
Meghan Downs
(Mother of [REDACTED])

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