

Kansas Learning First Alliance Brings Membership Together for a Day of Professional Learning: www.KLFA.org

The Kansas Learning First Alliance (KLFA) held the third meeting of the academic year on January 21, 2021 at 4:30PM via Zoom. Laurie Curtis, KLFA Chair, welcomed representatives of over 25 educational organizations in support of strong public education in our state. **Pittsburg State University** was admitted as a member organization to KLFA. Welcome PSU, we look forward to your ongoing support of Kansas public education!



Members were reminded of **Public Schools Week February 22-26**

www.publicschoolproud.org, a designated week for administrators, teachers, specialists, teacher educators, parents and school board members to host events for their communities. Members are encouraged to reach out to lawmakers, businesses, and other community members to discuss the importance of public education. We celebrate public schools year-round with #PublicSchoolProud to show some of the exemplary work of our nation's educators, particularly in these extraordinary times and circumstances. Members will be receiving additional information regarding how they can participate.

A panel discussion was held related to what lessons have been learned during this Covid-19 period (whether remote, hybrid or in-person learning) related to teaching and learning that can be used as we move forward into the future. A full recording of the meeting will be available on the KLFA website, under the Resource tab. Members of the panel included: **Andrea Curtis**, Secondary Special Education Teacher, USD 383, Manhattan, KS, **Lori Greenfield**, (2nd Grade), Prairie Park Elementary, USD 479, Lawrence, KS, **Magan Harrell**, Secondary Social Studies, USD 204, Bonner Springs/ Edwardsville, KS, **Lucas Shivers**, Administrator for Remote Learning & Director of Elementary Education, USD 383, Manhattan, KS, and **Bridget Walker**, (5th grade), Lakeside Elementary, USD 250, Pittsburg, KS. The questions and a summary of responses are as follows:

What lessons have been learned, by adjustments to the pandemic, that can inform our post-pandemic educational practice?

Student Learning: *Flexibility is key; Support the social-emotional learning in the hybrid and remote models as building social skills easier in person-to-person models. Modified strategies (such as Kagan strategies) have been developed; Maintain routines to provide students with a sense of stability. Celebrate learning goals that are met!; Make sure that student-centered activities that focus on standards are prioritized ([see Navigating the Change](#)) and build in time for relationship building and social interaction; Balance technology and non-technology activities. Consider use of authentic writing activities, white boards, etc.); Do not assume that students have tech competency.*

It is essential that procedures and routines are maintained, regardless of the mode of instruction. Those routines provide a sense of stability for all students. Teachers are needing to be creative in striving to meet the needs of students with an IEP or 504 Plan. Celebrations of learning are important NOW, as they have always been! Personalized learning is so critical- know your students' strengths, areas of challenge and their passion to fuel their learning. Administrators can connect via video to support and highlight celebratory moments for students. Encouragement continues in a virtual environment.

Professional Learning Needs: *trauma informed practices; ways to manage the anxiety of self and students; Utilize a consistent platform for teaching and communication- include ALL educators in this communication (teachers for electives, SPED, content area, parents, etc.). This can increase communication for student support. Parental involvement is vital- make sure to take time to educate parents on the technology platform so technology is a positive tool, not a barrier. Assist parents in setting up a schedule for child and establishing a positive work environment, and routine monitoring of the school portal. Consider that some parents have shown preference for virtual parent-teacher conferences which have taken away the challenge of work and daycare barriers.*

Bottom line- control what you can control and prioritize that!

How has the role of administrators and teachers been modified/ transformed to meet the needs of students and faculty when teaching face to face, virtually, or in hybrid model schools/ classrooms during this time?

The roles of teachers and administrators have changed dependent on model, but school leadership remains critically important. Districts must equip all educators to be successful. Educators appreciate having administrators not only listening to what is going on, but welcome them “visiting” the classroom (virtual, hybrid and in-person) to truly experience the unique challenges of this time. Teachers are very appreciative of administration that does anything to lighten the load (make calls, contacting parents, etc.) allowing teachers to focus on their teaching. Collaboration between all educators is essential now, more than ever! There needs to be courage to try new things and modify as needed. Administrators should seek to monitor the stress level of teachers as well as caring for themselves. Mental health must be addressed. Personalized professional learning has never been more appreciated or important. [See NEA resource](#). Clear expectations for students and teachers can lower the anxiety of all. Administrators are having to make important decisions and changes based on things that are out of their control (health department, government, illness of staff, students, etc.) raising the level of anxiety and stress of administrators. The shortage of substitutes for teachers and support staff is real and affects student learning. It is great practice to build relationships with community resources that are available to assist in decision making, such as county health departments visiting schools to make safety recommendations.

What is being done to address safety protocols during lunch periods?

Students have assigned seats; Plexiglass barriers have been installed, Students are assigned to areas of the school and some eat in the classrooms with teachers. Students remain in cohorts during the lunch period.

What has been the greatest Challenge and Celebration during this time?

Challenges *include teacher stress and burn-out. Weariness! Needing time to care for self and family, yet always needing to be available for students. Concerns regarding testing expectations during this unique time. Concerns exist for mental health of all- administration, teachers, students and parents. Concerns regarding the safety of the workplace. Respect for the way others are acting and reacting to the expectations (related to masks, distancing, quarantine, etc.) Quality and availability of technology/ internet and student expertise in utilizing it. Time ill or in quarantine resulting in lost educational opportunity. Students needing additional academic support that is not available at home. Students who need the most support (moving in and out of SPED courses) are exposed to more people rooms/ situations, placing them at risk. In-person interaction and support of fellow staff members is missed. There is a challenge in keeping the facility cleaned and sanitized at the highest level and air filtration systems monitored.*

Celebrations *include students who LOVE that they are able to take more ownership of their learning and schedule and are thriving and developing more independence, finding their own voice. Students are resilient and laughter and humor is still found amid the school day. School boards seem to be listening to the important lessons regarding priority standards; Personalized learning for both students and educators is receiving the attention it deserves to provide what is needed to meet the needs of learners. Others in the building or school system are stepping forward to help however, they can. The public has a greater appreciation for public schools and the challenges educators face. Public schools are meeting the needs of some private school students. Some districts have prioritized their technology needs to deliver 1:1 initiative and establishing internet connections. WE ARE UNLOCKING THE JOYS OF CHANGE!*

The Kansas Learning First Alliance is a coalition of over 35 educational organizations in Kansas representing school boards, administrators, teachers, teacher educator programs, parents, the Kansas State Board of Education, and the Kansas State Department Education. The mission of KLFA is “to unite the education community to improve our outstanding public education system, pre-K through higher education, to empower each Kansan to succeed in the diverse, interdependent world of the 21st century”, More information can be found at the KLFA [Website](#) and/or look for “Kansas Learning First Alliance” on Facebook. Please contact Laurie Curtis, KLFA Chair, for more information on how you can be a part of KLFA. (lauriejcurits@gmail.com)

**Future KLFA meetings scheduled for the 2020-2021 academic year are:
Thursday, April 8, 2021, 4:00 pm (via Zoom)**