



Monday, March 9, 2020

To: META member district superintendents or other educational leaders
From: Paul Craft, CEO, META Solutions

Re: Initial Preparations for School/District Disruptions

While the coronavirus hasn't yet impacted our area, Ohio educators, including the team at META, are taking the threat seriously. As districts contemplate the possibility of school closures, work-from-home situations, and distance learning, our ITC has been working closely with the ODE and the Governor's Office through the ITC's Management Council to make sure we are here to assist you in your efforts.

Below are some thoughts, suggested steps and resources as you make preparations.

Continuity of Operations:

1. Payroll and other fiscal operations are a priority for all districts. All fiscal offices must be prepared to continue operations even in a work-from-home situation. Fiscal departments must have their systems configured to allow for secure remote access utilizing a VPN setup. Train and practice these systems now. If any districts need assistance, contact your META technology support specialist.
2. Remote meeting technology such as Zoom, Cisco WebEx, Google Hangouts, etc. can be powerful tools for continuing operations when key team members are working remotely. All districts should select, implement and practice a remote meeting system prior to any potential need that arises. Fortunately, several of these systems are offering free trial periods as districts prepare for potential disruptions to normal schedules.
3. Stakeholder outreach systems such as School Messenger, ParentSquare, etc. should be tested and updated as needed.
4. VOIP/phone system configurations should be set to allow phone calls to be handled from off-site locations. These systems should be tested prior to being needed.

Continuity of Education:

1. Districts should fully implement adopted Learning Management Systems such as Canvas, Google Classroom, Blackboard, Schoology, etc. All teachers, at all grade levels, should be required to fully engage as these systems can provide a FERPA compliant method for delivering instructional material in remote learning situations.
2. Districts should ensure that all teachers can securely access Student Information Systems remotely.
3. Learning systems such as Lexia, ScootPad, Study Island, ST Math, etc. should be fully implemented with logins for all students tested.

INFOhio offers thousands of standard-aligned lessons and materials for all districts. In conjunction with the Management Council for Ohio's ITC's, META will be providing information for how to leverage all of the remarkable INFOhio content, entirely free of charge. INFOhio content is all electronic, easy to use remotely, and covers almost all Ohio standards, benchmarks and indicators articulated in the state standards and model curriculum.

4. Remote video teleconference systems such as Zoom, Cisco WebEx, Google Hangouts, etc. can be powerful tools for continuing instruction remotely. All districts should select, train on, implement and practice a remote teleconference system prior to any potential need that arises. Fortunately, several of these systems are offering free trial periods as districts prepare for potential disruptions to normal schedules.

Beginning the week of March 16, training will be made available for all districts on Zoom videoconference software, which enables leaders, teachers and students to engage in high quality videoconference sessions. It is encouraging to note that there are schools around the world right now that are maintaining their typical class schedules with all teachers and students participating remotely. A full Zoom license for each teacher is available for \$5 that is valid for the remainder of the school year (students are free), or you can use the basic Zoom licensing free of charge. Zoom requires no special technology; a teacher with a laptop/Chromebook and students with smartphones, Chromebooks and any other cellular or web enabled devices can fully participate. Students with traditional phones can still participate over audio.

5. Not every student will have access to a device or to broadband connectivity. Districts should immediately survey students and families and identify those for whom additional support will be needed and then work to find resources to support those students and families.
6. Districts should consider establishing hotspots in school parking lots for families lacking access at home. Further, districts should publish lists of available hotspots within their district boundaries at facilities like libraries, restaurants, etc.

Additionally, we will be coordinating a clearinghouse of important links for schools as you consider how best to continue the teaching and learning process in the face of the health situation.

Much remains uncertain - such as the future of state and/or AP testing in a remote environment - and there are plenty of other issues beyond continuing learning that you will be addressing if or when this unprecedented effort in remote learning unfolds. Please know that the team at META Solutions stands ready to support your staff and students in any way we can. If I can be of assistance, please feel free to reach out at pcraft@metasolutions.net or at 740-389-4798 ext. 16464.