



# SEEKING STRUCTURE

*With the transition to online school staffers desire structured school days and for the district to make a plan in case students can't go back to school in the fall*

by | catherine erickson

I used to stress about being able to get from the first floor to the fifth floor within the five-minute passing period. Now I sleep through most of my morning, knowing my only planned event is a non-mandatory history Zoom call — the only class I've regularly met with this entire virtual quarter. I feel stranded without a structured schedule that incorporates social interaction, and the district is not helping.

With the Ivy Leagues already discussing plans to cancel the 2020 fall semester, Kansas schools are likely to follow their lead as Gov. Laura Kelly was quick to cancel the rest of this school year. The online system we have in place right now is barely sustainable for another month, let alone to kick off a new school year. SMSD needs to recognize that no master schedule, no accountability for attendance and no incentive to maintain grades is not practical. They need to use this time to begin formulating a structured plan for school in the fall in the event that it is online.

Kelly's abrupt announcement for all schools in Kansas to be closed for the remainder of the school year left the district with little time to develop a plan for continuous learning. I expected the first couple of weeks to be a difficult transition — however, as we start our fifth week of online education, I've seen no improvement.

School days have no enforced structure, making it difficult for students to motivate themselves on their own time. And with the gradebook

practically locked in place, many students have gone completely MIA.

As a public school district, it's understandable that the district adjusts to a lower denominator. Students' home lives, child-care obstacles and financial struggles that have emerged due to the coronavirus make it difficult for many students to perform as well as they would in a school setting, and this should be taken into account for online school.

However, "taken into account" shouldn't justify calling off most learning for the rest of the year.

Teachers were given a choice of how to continue their classes virtually, but that decision shouldn't lay completely in their hands. Because of this, I've had only one teacher consistently hold Zoom lectures similar to those we had in class. As for the rest of my teachers, some post assignments on Google Classroom, and some I haven't heard from since the beginning of April.

Scheduled "face-to-face" communication over programs like Zoom is pivotal for maintaining a relationship with students, providing structure and keeping students interested in the course. Sporadic check-ins from teachers isn't the same as having class set four times a week, with scheduled due dates and a sense of purpose. These factors simply cannot be provided over weekly Google Classroom updates. I'm sorry but typing my response to the question of the day for English in Google Classroom just does not compare to discussing it with the whole class.

If the district wants students to stay interested in their classes, this personal connection is necessary and should be required from teachers.

Without scheduled interaction, students quickly lose motivation because it doesn't feel like anyone is paying attention to their work. Especially because grades can't decrease, students need that connection to feel like there's a purpose behind their work.

Many local private schools such as Pembroke Hill School have implemented daily schedules adjusted for distanced learning. The schedule is slated down to the hour, with blocks throughout the week assigned to each period while still holding students accountable for attendance. SMSD should mirror some of these methods in a plan for the upcoming fall semester, in the event that schools remain closed. Special circumstances where students cannot participate in a more intensive schedule while at home can be evaluated case-by-case by the district, rather than lowering the expectations for every student.

In addition to all sense of routine being tossed out the window, incentive to complete assignments to maintain GPA has been obliterated with the district's decision to freeze grades in place. While this decision is understandable for a couple of weeks of continuous learning, it is not adequate. Without the motivation to maintain grades in the upcoming fall semester, students will continue to not complete assignments.

## STRUCTURED SCHOOL DAY

*A guide to recreate a normal school day at home*



Set alarms and create a schedule to stay on top of your work



Work on your most important classes first



Give yourself breaks frequently to avoid stress

## FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

*Students share their experiences with online learning*



Honestly I haven't been doing that much [online school] because I feel unmotivated since our grade can't go up... I feel like there's no point in doing it

**alexa true** | freshman



I feel like the district could have done more with accountability in classes from the start, my sister has scheduled zoom classes every day for college and with my classes there isn't really that kind of classroom feel anymore.

**claire baker** | junior