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During ongoing COVID-19 crisis, learning opportunities for Milwaukee students vary greatly school-to-school, class-to-class

Some schools provide full distance learning,
others only offer paper worksheets

MILWAUKEE – Schools are now in the third week of shifting to serve students remotely during the COVID-19 crisis, and current approaches to instruction vary widely across the city – and even between classrooms within the same schools.

In most cases, schools have provided only very basic learning opportunities for students in the form of printed packets of worksheets. Some [individual teachers](#) are going further, engaging in voluntary efforts to serve the students in their specific classrooms.

While the vast majority of Milwaukee schools are now providing some form of learning opportunity to their students, relatively few schools are endeavoring to provide a coordinated, school-wide, comprehensive distance learning program designed to be a genuine replacement for in-person instruction.

Fortunately, there are exceptions: The schools described in this report are implementing distance learning programs that keep students moving forward in every classroom. While every school has room for improvement in meeting new challenges during this chaotic time, those included here stand out as models.

Meaningful learning must continue as soon as possible

In the first days of this crisis, schools rightly focused first on meeting the basic needs of their school community. Continuing these provisions is essential. Next, schools must build on these successful first efforts by providing distance learning opportunities that keep students on track.

The latest epidemiological projections suggest it is increasingly likely school buildings will not reopen before the scheduled end of the school year. That means schools must implement meaningful alternatives to in-person instruction now, or else deprive students of nearly 1/3 of their annual learning progress.

The stakes for Milwaukee are high: [Research indicates](#) children from low-income communities lose significant academic ground during traditional school breaks. A similar phenomenon will likely occur during the current school disruption. Without intervention, children already the furthest behind will lose even more ground, and our city's worst-in-the-nation achievement gaps will widen.

Schools enter a new phase of the COVID-19 crisis

This matters beyond the here and now. [Some experts have warned](#) that periodic school closures may be necessary beyond the current school year, at least until a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 is widely available. In this event, schools will need robust distance learning programs and digital infrastructure that can be 'switched on' at a moment's notice.

Barring a miracle cure for COVID19, distance learning is no longer a luxury, but an essential component of our K-12 education system.

ABOUT CITY FORWARD COLLECTIVE: City Forward Collective is a Milwaukee nonprofit working to secure the future of Milwaukee and its institutions, economy, and quality of life by ending educational inequity and ensuring every single child has the opportunity to attend a high-quality school. The organization works directly with Milwaukee families, communities, and school teams to build skills, knowledge, and power through four key strategic focus areas:

- **Effective & Representative Talent:** Ensure strong, culturally competent teachers, school leaders, principal managers, and governing board members, with an emphasis on more black and brown people in those roles
- **Family & Community Organizing:** Facilitate sustained family and community organizing to build a movement of Milwaukee residents who understand and advocate for quality schools across our city
- **Community-Informed Policy:** Advocate for policies that eliminate educational inequities and ensure quality schools thrive; align communities and create coalitions to achieve positive change
- **Strategic Investment:** Strategically invest and channel philanthropic dollars to expand existing high-quality schools, incubate new schools, and improve promising schools

For more information, visit <http://cityforwardcollective.org> or contact Isral DeBruin by phone at (414) 459-1894 or by email at isral.debruin@cityforwardcollective.org.

Below is a roundup of **Milwaukee schools going above and beyond** to ensure their students stay on track despite the upheaval. School-level contacts are listed, and can be contacted with questions about their approach to distance learning.

CARMEN SCHOOLS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SOUTH HIGH, NORTHWEST MIDDLE/HIGH, SOUTHEAST HIGH, SOUTH MIDDLE, STELLAR ELEMENTARY)

Carmen Schools of Science and Technology is ensuring its 2,000 students have ongoing access to a quality education by providing take-home technology, mailing instructional packets, taking learning online, and ensuring educators remain available for student and family communication during school closures. This has meant distributing Chromebooks to more than 860 students without home computers and mailing instructional packets to the homes of over 500 families without internet access.

Before statewide school closures went into place, Carmen staff worked to identify and overcome families' barriers to accessing online instruction whenever possible. Educators created plans and materials to begin distance learning, including teacher-created websites, Google Classroom, video science labs, group study sessions, streaming lessons, and continued special education for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

With distance learning up and running, families stay up-to-date and connected to the school community through weekly communication with Carmen leaders, daily video greetings from teachers, and communication between teachers, students, and parents via email, texting, phone, and video chat. Students can also access streaming video lunch hours and morning assemblies, and can log on to see their friends.

To meet staff needs, Carmen leaders have provided clear guidelines for distance learning, family communication, and student feedback. These parameters allow teachers flexibility to engage students while also meeting their own personal and family needs.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Michael Nguyen, nguyenm@carmenschools.org

ENROLLMENT: 2,000

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter school authorized by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors

CRISTO REY JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL

Cristo Rey Jesuit remains committed to providing care for the whole person regardless if students are in school or learning virtually.

Academic studies are continuing virtually through fully formed online classes, with students checking in to every class starting March 18. The official online school day runs from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., including classwork, instruction from teachers, discussions, activities, and meetings with teachers and other students. Teachers and students use tools like Hapara and Google Classroom to communicate and share schoolwork. Student work is graded as usual. Each

Cristo Rey student has a Chromebook, and students picked up technology and other materials March 16 and 17. The school is providing internet access and meals to families in need, and further accommodations are being made for students who can't complete coursework because of family responsibilities or technology issues.

In place of internships at local companies, students are receiving workplace learning through online modules they complete on a weekly basis. Students engage in daily prayer and community with peers through Faith Formation small groups. Students and families have also been invited to access counseling as-needed.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Jessica Pelnar, jpelnar@cristoreymilwaukee.org

ENROLLMENT: 398

SCHOOL TYPE: Private Catholic school accepting tuition vouchers through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

DR. HOWARD FULLER COLLEGIATE ACADEMY

Students at Dr. Howard Fuller Collegiate Academy are engaged in full distance learning to keep seniors on track for the school's typical graduation requirements, and to ensure students in grades 9-11 meet requirements to advance to the next grade.

Teachers are moving forward using the same curriculum and grading structures as before the closure. Educators lead online learning through video conferencing tools and regular office hours for individual and group help. Staff are tracking which students are engaged in school work, and reaching out to provide additional support to those who are not. Students with IEPs are provided weekly services, and IEP meetings with parents and caregivers continue through video conferences.

HFCA is maintaining school culture with weekly school-wide web broadcasts, virtual Town Hall sessions, social media, and continued virtual versions of planned school-wide celebrations. Students can access guidance counselors for social-emotional support. College admissions counseling is also continuing. In addition, the school is providing emergency support to its alumni, including stipends to help with day-to-day expenses while continuing their college studies from home.

HFCA's robust response was possible because school leaders began planning early, following the CDC's initial March 9 recommendation that schools prepare for the spread of COVID-19. The school polled students and families about their access to home computers and internet access and developed a plan with three emergency closure scenarios. By March 23, 100% of families had been contacted by school staff to discuss the plan and identify resources families might need. More than 200 Chromebooks have been deployed, with remote tech support provided within 24 hours to ensure everything was working properly.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Bill Attewell, w.attewell@howardfullerca.org

ENROLLMENT: 300

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter school authorized by the Milwaukee Common Council

MALAIKA EARLY LEARNING CENTER

Teachers at Malaika Early Learning Center are teaching virtually and connecting with families through Class Dojo. Teachers prepared March 16 and 17, creating weekly learning packets aligned with school-wide curriculum maps for all major academic subjects: English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social studies. Each day teachers upload an instructional video on Class Dojo, along with assignments and due dates. Parents can comment or send messages when their child has completed the work, if they need more time, or if they need additional help from the teacher.

School administrators also comment and speak to families in each classroom, and maintain school-wide culture through virtual school traditions like a weekly Scholar Shout-out video congratulating families that have completed the week's work.

In addition, teachers are making continued use of the school's existing online teaching tools: Epic (Grades 1-3); Reading A to Z (Grades K5-3); Zearn (Grades 1-3); Reading IQ (Grade 3); Read Works (Grade 2); ABC Mouse (K4/K5)

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Chanel Warren, M.ed, cwarren@malaikaelc.org

ENROLLMENT: 95

SCHOOL TYPE: Private school accepting tuition vouchers through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

MILWAUKEE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Milwaukee Academy of Science shifted to virtual learning on March 16. Middle and high school students received Chromebooks as-needed to facilitate online learning through Google Classroom. Elementary teachers set up Google Classrooms for students with internet and technology access, and all elementary students are being provided learning packets for enrichment.

School administrators are checking in with each teacher weekly to receive updates on student progress, discuss concerns about student access to instruction, and to connect staff to resources and trainings to help deliver effective online instruction.

MAS uses Class Dojo to stay connected with students and parents. Through the platform, teachers and administrators are sending messages, sharing read-alouds, and giving shout-outs to keep the positivity and momentum going while kids are learning at home.

The school is also providing curbside meal service for its students and all other school-aged children. Meals can be picked up from 7-10am daily. Deliveries are available if needed.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Tresca Meiling, tmeiling@mascience.org

ENROLLMENT: 2,000

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter school authorized by the Milwaukee Common Council

MILWAUKEE COLLEGE PREP (36TH STREET, 38TH STREET, LLOYD STREET, LOLA ROWE NORTH)

The Milwaukee College Prep network is providing families with a daily schedule and resources through its website.

Each day begins with a video morning greeting. Students then engage in assignments through Google Classroom, learning packets, and recommended activities. Teachers are posting daily read-aloud videos and assignments covering math, reading, physical education, and social-emotional learning. Teachers communicate daily with students in their homeroom class, responding to each assignment in Google Classroom or Flipgrid, and connecting twice per week with each individual student.

To ensure all students have access to online learning opportunities, Chromebooks were made available to any student in need.

Milwaukee College Prep social workers and school psychologists are regularly checking in on families and creating a family support tracker to help address and prioritize needs as they develop.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Sarah Kies, Director of External Relations

ENROLLMENT: 2,000

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter school authorized by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors

MILWAUKEE EXCELLENCE CHARTER SCHOOL

Milwaukee Excellence educators are regularly uploading video lessons, quizzes, and other resources for students throughout the week, along with a daily schedule that approximates a regular school day. Part of that school day includes a block for students to connect with one another as a means of maintaining community and limiting social isolation – the school even held a virtual spirit week that included a ‘virtual twin day,’ when students were encouraged to dress like a classmate and show off their twin outfits with photos and videos.

Teachers are making phone calls to each student at least once per week, checking in on their learning, technology access, and to ensure basic needs are being met. Teachers are available to students for further communication during regular school-day hours. School leaders continue to provide coaching and feedback on teacher lessons. Even spring parent-teacher conferences are moving forward as-usual.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Maurice Thomas, maurice.thomas@mkeexcellence.org

ENROLLMENT: 434

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter school authorized by the Milwaukee Board of School Directors

NOTRE DAME SCHOOL OF MILWAUKEE

Teachers at Notre Dame took learning online March 16. Educators are using the online Class Dojo and Google Classroom platforms to remain in contact with students and families, record attendance, assign and accept assignments, facilitate group work, and provide digital resources. Teachers are using Zoom to conduct live class instruction and meetings for group projects. The gym teacher is posting daily physical activities for students, and the school counselor has created a virtual counseling and wellness program accessible for all students. Parents are replying with videos of students engaging in lessons at home. To ensure all students could access this programming, 150 Chromebooks were distributed to families without home computers.

Teachers and school leaders continue working to share ideas, swap lesson plans, and build online resources for students and parents.

The school is also working on plans to maintain school community. For example, a Father-Daughter Dance scheduled for March 21 was held virtually, with girls and dads dancing in their living rooms and sharing videos through social media.

Notre Dame is providing breakfast and lunch every day for every child in the household of each of the school's students. In addition to food, families can also pick up books.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Patrick Mooney, pmooney@notredamemke.org

ENROLLMENT: 539

SCHOOL TYPE: Private Catholic school accepting tuition vouchers through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

ROCKETSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS (SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY PREP; TRANSFORMATION PREP)

Rocketship schools made a full transition to virtual schooldays March 18. Distance learning begins each morning with Rocketship's signature daily morning "[Launch](#)" assemblies, a ritual that brings the school community together to sing, dance, and motivate students for the day ahead. In addition, the network is using Facebook Live for daily social-emotional learning lessons, community lunch hours, and weekly parent community meetings. Days end with "Landing," a second daily community-wide gathering to reflect on the day and simulate school dismissal in order to maintain a normal school-day structure for students and foster the richness of informal interactions that occur across the school day.

Rocketship schools have an easier time making this transition than many schools, in large part because online learning has always been an important part of the network's normal school days. Teachers are recording video lessons on Google Classroom to guide students through core content in Humanities and STEM. Students also have access to the same online learning programs they are accustomed to using in the classroom. And the network is also providing solutions to families without access to an internet connected device.

Finally, both buildings are serving grab-and-go breakfast and lunch for their students and all other school-aged children.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Brittany Kinser, bkinser@rsed.org

ENROLLMENT: 523 students at Rocketship Southside Community Prep; 146 students at Rocketship Transformation Prep

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter schools authorized by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

ST. ANTHONY SCHOOL

St. Anthony School planned and executed an extensive emergency response plan ahead of expected school closures. As a result, 100% of school families collected Chromebooks and learning materials for their children, and virtual instruction began March 16. All grade levels are receiving engaging virtual lessons, and educators are maintaining ongoing contact with students and families.

Looking forward, the admissions team is processing student applications virtually to ensure new and returning families are enrolled smoothly. In anticipation of school buildings reopening, the maintenance and cleaning team performed 3 deep cleanings and stocked classrooms and offices with cleaning supplies, and the food service team has planned extensively for possible food shortages.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Ellen Wilkinson, wilkinsone@stanthonymilwaukee.org

ENROLLMENT: 1,700

SCHOOL TYPE: Private Catholic school accepting tuition vouchers through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

ST. AUGUSTINE PREPARATORY ACADEMY

Virtual learning is occurring for all students school-wide at Aug Prep. Every child has a Chromebook and internet access, and 100% of families picked up instructional packets and technology. This allowed teachers to make a complete pivot to distance learning starting March 19. In addition, more than 250 high school students also picked up musical instruments and textbooks to ensure ongoing enrichment. On the second day of distance learning, Aug Prep notched a 90% attendance rate.

The unique circumstances have permitted some teachers to get creative: One is leading a comic book creation activity where students can build one page per day while the teacher does the same. The elementary music teacher prepared DIY kits for students to build their own box guitar or rain stick, complete with photo-based instructions. The gym teacher is posting video fitness exercises to keep kids moving. Social workers are also posting videos and other resources to encourage students in practicing mindfulness, gratitude, and healthy living.

The school also shifted its spring break to occur a week earlier (from 4/6-10 to 3/30-4/3) in hopes of minimizing disrupted learning time and childcare and work disruptions for families.

Aug Prep is offering drive-thru-style meal pickup each morning for their students and all other school-aged children. In the first four days of meal service, the school served more than 4,000 children.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Marisol Alamo, malamo@augprep.org

ENROLLMENT: 1,300

SCHOOL TYPE: Private nondenominational Christian school accepting tuition vouchers through the Milwaukee/Wisconsin Parental Choice Program.

ST. MARCUS LUTHERAN SCHOOL (MAIN CAMPUS; NORTH CAMPUS)

St. Marcus School moved to virtual learning March 23. Students in grades 5-8 each have school-issued Chromebooks and receive daily videos from teachers covering the day's content. In the afternoon, students interact online with teachers in real time. Teachers also host livestream virtual lessons and discussions. For students in grades K4-4, learning packets and online resources have been provided. St. Marcus is working to equip primary grade students with technology in the near future.

An Emergency Response Team has been formed to best serve the needs of St. Marcus families, staff, church congregants, and the community being impacted by COVID-19. A [form](#) is being used to identify specific needs and to connect volunteers who can provide support through time, donations of supplies, or financial contributions.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Sara Roemer, sara.roemer@stmarcus.org

ENROLLMENT: 920

SCHOOL TYPE: Private Lutheran school accepting tuition and vouchers through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

SEEDS OF HEALTH (SEEDS OF HEALTH ELEMENTARY, GRANDVIEW HIGH SCHOOL, MC2 HIGH SCHOOL, TENOR HIGH SCHOOL, VERITAS HIGH SCHOOL)

The Seeds of Health network of schools have moved to online school days that run from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Students without home computers or internet access have been loaned Chromebooks and mobile hotspots, allowing them to continue accessing instruction. Teachers are using online platforms Bloomz and Google Classroom to communicate each day's agenda, assignments, and expectations. Instructional content is delivered through video, audio, and real-time screen sharing. Students receiving special education services are continuing to receive instruction as outlined in their Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

All students can contact teachers throughout school day hours with questions and concerns, including through email and Google Hangouts. Teachers take student attendance based on completion of required work. Students and parents can also schedule time with a guidance counselor or administrator to discuss mental health concerns.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Jodi Weber, jweber@mysohi.org

ENROLLMENT: 1300+

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter schools, authorized by multiple authorizers

UNITED COMMUNITY CENTER (ACOSTA MIDDLE SCHOOL; BRUCE-GUADALUPE COMMUNITY SCHOOL)

United Community Center Schools began offering virtual, at-home learning on March 19 using Google Classroom, Freckle and Class Dojo. During the school's spring break, teachers and administrators spent time reflecting on the early virtual learning efforts and finalizing additional plans for at-home student learning. UCC offered families several time slots to pick up books, Chromebooks, and learning packets. All students in grades 2-8 have school-issued Chromebooks to aid in learning. Younger students have been given comprehensive learning packets.

Teachers communicate with students each day by 9 a.m., providing an update on expectations for the day and week ahead. Teachers and administrators hold regular office hours to answer questions and interact with students and parents. Specific learning activities vary from teacher to teacher, including video readings and lectures to interactive online activities, and independent assignments. Students in the Latino Arts Strings Program continue their lessons virtually.

In just the first two days of virtual learning, students in grades 3-5 completed 12,557 math problems and 2,424 word study sessions. Daily participation rates consistently average 85-90%.

Guidance counselors share resources with students and parents via Class Dojo, including mental health tips. Additionally, counselors are checking in on families they know might need extra assistance during this time.

For the 251 families registered in our Head Start program, Family Advocate staff call each family daily, or as-requested by the family. These staff members verify that the family understands the day's school work and the suggested at-home activities. They also work with parents to address personal matters, like providing diapers and wipes, helping to navigate unemployment paperwork, and ensuring continued access to food. Families have indicated deep appreciation for these check-ins.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT: Jennifer Steiner, jennifers@unitedcc.org

ENROLLMENT: 1700

SCHOOL TYPE: Public charter schools authorized by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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