



From the Home Front: Remote Learning after School Buildings Reopened

By Educator Barnes – August 26, 2020

My sons attend school in Washington Township. Their school district leadership decided to reopen all schools remotely. My twin sons' first day of school was July 30, and we have had highs and lows. Although my husband and I tried to take what we learned from our children

attending school remotely when school buildings closed in March, the situation is not the same as before, so we are still making adjustments.

First, my husband and I had to decide whether or not to have our twin sons in the same class or in different classes. As parents of multiples, we firmly believe that we should make this decision and not the school. Luckily, our sons' principal allows us to make this decision each year. Kindergarten, first, and third grade, our sons were in separate classes. For second grade, and this year for the fourth grade, they are in the same class. It was hard to navigate remote learning for two different classes. Since we had the option of not having two teachers and two different styles of instructions, we requested for our sons to be in the same class. This allows our sons to be more connected with their work and be able to discuss it with each other.

Having children with multiple teachers during remote learning is challenging for parents. I have heard from friends how hard it has been to juggle the different ways teachers want students to respond and submit assignments. Even if a school district mandates that all teachers use the same learning management system such as Canvas or Google classroom, teachers, many times, will embed other technology for students to use. Helping navigate that technology falls back on the parents. One teacher may request a video submission of an assignment and other teachers may request submission through a Google document. The parents are managing both of these requirements under one roof with limited support from the school. This is why we eliminated the option of having two teachers.

The next issue was the change in our work schedules. As schools reopened, some parents had to return to work. In our respective fields of education and technology, my husband and I are both administrators. We decided that we should divide the day since I had to return to campus. My middle school students are 100% remote, but the teachers I supervise are required to teach from campus. My school approved me to work remotely Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the afternoon and on Tuesday and Thursday in the morning. Then, my husband and I overlapped our schedules by an hour so we could share any information about what our sons were working on.

Our sons immediately took advantage of us adjusting to the change. During one week they fell days behind. We asked for an extension for submitting work, and their teacher granted it. In their defense, their doctor and dentist appointments took place during that week. They should have happened earlier during the summer, but the pandemic caused the appointments to be rescheduled.

Since our boys were in the same class, we put them on the same computer to attend live Zoom sessions. We quickly learned that was the wrong idea. They were pushing each other, talking to each other, and having a good 'ole time while on mute. It also made it hard for them to answer questions in the chat because they had to take turns. The class had to wait for them both to respond. Since they are identical twins, it made it hard for classmates to tell them apart. (If only my son who wears glasses would actually keep them on his face during class like he is supposed to do.)

We moved them to separate computers and separate desks. We had to buy one of our sons a new desk because he was using the desk my dad purchased me for college back in 2001. Let's just say several parts of the desk were falling to pieces and that also caused a distraction.

Then, we had another problem. They needed headphones so they would not get feedback when they were talking. My husband found headphones for them. The headphones also kept the class from overhearing my husband and me on Zoom or Microsoft Teams calls when they were unmuted. The downside is that we no longer could hear the teacher teaching live. One of the pros during this pandemic, if your children are remote, is that parents have 100% access to see how their children's teachers are teaching. Luckily, their teacher saves the recordings on Canvas. We can watch the lessons later. Both my husband and I have watched lessons at a later time. Sometimes our sons were confused or couldn't remember what was taught. We have watched lessons with our sons to see what was taught and to help reteach if they don't understand.

Once we figured out the desk and headphones situation, and my husband learned how to support with Canvas, the learning management system, we thought we were good to go. Nope! One constant during this pandemic is that my husband and I still have to work when we were home. My sons were missing the live math sessions because, according to them, they would forget to get back on. I'm not sure that was the case especially after I busted them for trying to take turns attending the math lesson so they both wouldn't have to show up. This implies they didn't forget. Also, I have a schedule posted between their desks with the times of all classes.

Just in case they actually forgot, we decided to put in more supports. We purchased two alarm clocks that allowed you to set two alarms. During certain parts of the day, such as live Zoom lessons, the alarm would go off. Magically, when we got the alarm clocks, they stopped forgetting to get on Zoom when my husband and I were working remotely and could not stop and tell them to get on the video call.

Our sons are now 9 1/2, so they should be able to have some responsibility to go on Zoom. We should not have to be the ones getting them each time. We simply gave them a tool to be more responsible. I see gaining responsibility as another benefit of remote learning.

Once the problem of getting on Zoom was solved, we found another one: pretending to be actively engaged in class. Their teacher does prevent them from being able to private message each other on Zoom; however, Canvas has an inbox. My teacher's gut told me my sons were up to something. I went through their Canvas inbox and found foolishness.

 **Jeremiah Barnes, James Barnes**
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 **James Barnes, Jeremiah Barnes**
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 OK JUST STOP

 **Jeremiah Barnes, James Barnes**
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 **James Barnes, Jeremiah Barnes**
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