

USD 329 adapts to challenges of online classes

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Although the buildings are empty, USD 329 is still educating students through a Continuous Learning Plan.

In mid-March, Gov. Laura Kelly closed all Kansas school buildings for the remainder of the school year because of the coronavirus pandemic, forcing USD 329 and the other school districts to continue students' education from outside the classroom.

The Kansas State Department of Education required all districts to complete a Continuous Learning Plan (CLP) with specific descriptions of how the district planned to meet requirements from a district, building and classroom perspective. Plans had to be sent to the USD 329 Board of Education for approval and then to the State Board of Education. "This entire process has been tedious and required a significant amount of time with district staff and administration in a series of virtual meetings to plan," WHS principal Jan Hutley said.

WHS staff meet weekly to dis-

cuss improvements and implementation of the CLP.

Hutley said it has been important to maintain a school environment for staff and students. "We work continuously to tailor, modify and improve every aspect of the school learning environment. The richer this environment is with experiences, rigorous and viable curriculum, attentive adults, etc., the more students thrive and are prepared for their futures. The circumstances created by COVID-19 have taken the power of the traditional school environment away from us as educators, and we must work hard everyday to recreate it by solely virtual means."

In a short period, teachers had to create new lessons to accommodate all students. Some teachers have scheduled weekly meetings with students through Zoom, a video-conferencing application, to discuss upcoming assignments and answer questions. Several teachers already had been using Google Classroom earlier in the year for assignments and announcements. Now others have also created Google classrooms to get information to their

students.

Superintendent Brad Starnes said the mission is to put no one in the district at risk, students or staff. Instruction changes vary depending on the class, but work is required to be kept under 30 minutes per class daily to decrease stress on students.

"We want to prepare you for the next chapter in your lives while extending grace and common sense."
— Brad Starnes

WHS physical education teacher Garrett Eck sends workouts to his students through an app called Rack Performance. The students can choose to do 80 percent of the given workout or 25 minutes of exercising.

There have been challenges in making a transition to the CPL while being able to accommodate every student. WHS science teacher Brandi Miller said that some of the biggest challenges for her were get-

ting resources from her classes, deciding what standards to focus on for the remaining year, and finding the best way to reach her students and create meaningful lessons that wouldn't take longer than 30 minutes a day. "I have been a teacher for 16 years, and coming up with new ideas and activities to do in the classroom is fun. Each group of kids is different so I'm always ready to do something different," Miller said. "I love to see my students discover, to learn, to work things out, etc, but now I don't get to see those things first hand, I just get to talk to them via e-mail or Google Hangouts. I am really bummed that my Advanced Biology, and Anatomy kids won't be able to dissect and we won't get to take our class trip to Cloud County — those are irreplaceable experiences. I really miss my students."

Lessons may be different, but students are still accountable for their work. Students' grades can still go up or down, based on the teacher's specifications for the participation and effort on assignments. In a message sent out to the district, Starnes said that students

may still fail a course if they make no effort to follow the CPL.

Kansas State High School Activities Association eligibility rules relating to participation in sports and other activities for next fall are also still in place, so students have to pass classes to continue progress towards graduation.

"We are not unique in this struggle," Starnes said. "Every chat and articles posted nationally are dealing with grading. We want to keep things normal as much as possible. We want accountability. We want to prepare you for the next chapter in your lives while extending grace and common sense."

Not only are teachers creating new lessons, but some are also balancing teaching their students while monitoring their own children's learning. Miller, who has two children, said that some days are more difficult than others and can make her miss details on assignments for her class.

"As a mom, this is really tough; as a teacher, I try to keep this in mind when making my assignments and posing assignments for the students," Miller said.

Spring sports teams devastated over cancellation of season

TRACK GRADUATES SIX SENIORS FROM PROMISING SQUAD

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On March 17, Governor Kelly made the decision to close all Kansas school facilities for the remainder of the year, ending the 2020 track season before it ever began.

Track had high hopes for this season, with several returning state qualifiers and medalists, and upperclassmen who "set the tone for what was expected," according to head coach Roger Alderman.

In an e-mail to athletes and coaches shortly after the announcement, coach Alderman tried to put things in perspective.

"It is OK to feel angry, sad, frustrated, confused, upset, or any other emotion. It's good that it matters enough to you that it is tough to get over. In life you want to be involved in careers, activities, relationships, etc that matter that much to you, it's what makes them worthwhile," Alderman wrote. "Know that even though our season can be taken away, our community of athletes, coaches, family, fans, etc cannot be taken away."

The team looked forward to six seniors finishing their high school track careers on a high note.

"This senior class is one of the most athletically gifted you will find at a small school, and that applied to the track team members as well," throwing coach Brendan Praeger said. "They really expect success in every sport, and I think that pushes everyone to be better."

Sophomore Maddie Shurle reflected on the impact they had on younger athletes.

"The seniors definitely pushed us to work harder in practice. They would always bring positivity as well, and just make sure we were doing what was right," she said.

Senior Bryce Tharman was particularly upset over the cancella-

tion of his last track season, as he worked harder than ever during the off season to make it the best one yet.

"As upset as I am about it all, there's not much I can do about it. It sucks having put in more miles this winter than I had done any other off-season, but I've come to realize there's nothing I can do about it. Just because my track season is done, doesn't mean you won't still see me running on the dirt roads every day."

Another senior out of six whose track career was cut short is Sierra Quatham. "I'm really going to miss the family aspect and working out with my friends. I have so many memories from sports, and it's a shame I won't be able to make more... I'm also really going to miss Alderman as my coach. He has done so much for his athletes, and I don't think there are enough ways to thank him."

Tharman, who's dad has been extremely helpful for him in coping with this change, said, "As of March 30, 2020 it has been 18 years since my dad's spinal cord injury that put him in a wheelchair. Clearly that was quite the frustrating setback for him. COVID-19 ending my last ever season of track was a setback for me as well, but he's explained to me how he's learned that everything happens for a reason, and that you can't sit around, feel sorry and dwell. You need to accept, overcome and make the best of things."

Coach Praeger said he's been encouraging athletes to try to keep things in perspective. "When you're in high school, especially at the end of your senior year, it seems like the most important time in your entire life, but I think if you talk to a lot of adults, very few will say their life was defined by any three-month period in high school. There is a lot they can do during this time to keep growing and improving as people, and they can't let an unfortunate

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situation define their whole high school experience."

Alderman's final message to athletes emphasized the importance of building a strong team. "One of the blessings of sports is that it creates these teams that we can rely on to share our joys and comfort our sorrows. You will always be a part of Wabaunsee Track & Field and I hope that means as much to you as it does for me."

BASEBALL GRADUATES EXPERIENCED CLASS, BUT WELL-STOCKED FOR FUTURE

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With school being transitioned to completely online due to the current stay at home order as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, WHS coaching staff and players took time to reflect on the season that could have been.

With the 2020 season, the baseball team had some changes to the coaching staff. David Amer and Colby Harris joined the team as assistant coaches.

"I was really enjoying getting back into the baseball groove and working with all of the guys," Amer said. "It sucks we don't get to enjoy baseball this spring, but if it helps keep family members alive, it's what we need to do."

Like the other coaches, head coach Jeron Weisshaar was disappointed by the stopped season. "Obviously disappointment, frustration, etc, but I pretty much knew it was coming, so I wasn't shocked. Not really sure how many of the players reacted as I was not able to physically tell them that the season had been cancelled, but I'm sure, for many, it was much the same of disappointment and frustration on

various levels."

This year's team was composed mostly of juniors and seniors, however, according to Weisshaar, the team had "potentially the largest freshman class in several years" which presented the possibility of one of the largest teams in program history.

The Chargers were looking to be led by five seniors. Top returners included Jackson Frank (2019 All-MEL) and Chad Chambers (2018, 2019 All-MEL and All-State).

"I believe this year's seniors would have had a tremendous impact on the team," Weisshaar said. "Four of the five were going to be 4-year players; 3 of them looking to be 4-year starters pretty much, plus being the last of the group from the state-qualifying team a few years ago, that's a lot of experience that will be missed."

SOFTBALL'S HOPE FOR ANOTHER CHAMPIONSHIP CUT SHORT

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Following the success of the 2019 season, the Charger softball team was hoping to win another state championship this spring. Unfortunately, due to the recent coronavirus outbreak, the season was cut short.

The team had many exciting changes to look forward to this year, including Joe Dee Tarbutton's first year as head coach. Tarbutton said he looked forward to a state championship with the team this year. He was also looking forward to "coaching a very talented team with Coach Oliver and Coach Eck."

Senior Autymn Schreiner hoped to find success with the team as her high school career came to a close. "I expected to make a run for another state championship. We had a lot of solid girls return from last year and I thought a couple of the freshmen were going to make big

impacts on the team," Schreiner said. What she misses most is her teammates. "I was looking forward to playing my last season with some of the girls I've played with since I was 8," Schreiner said, "I was excited to have one last season with them and even some new teammates and for it all to just get thrown away is heartbreaking."

This season was expected to be a crucial year for several players, including juniors Reagan Kelley and Ilyana Tertzanlis. Kelley, who played a successful role on the team as a freshman, hoped to return strong following an injury that prevented her from playing last year. "I expected this season to be really good. We had a lot of athletes that would have brought lots of great things to this team. I feel like we could have won state again," Kelley said, "I was looking forward to the new coaching staff and playing an amazing season with everyone."

Tertzanlis, a foreign exchange student from Germany, looked forward to being a part of the team this spring. "I was looking forward to everyday practices and just improving and playing on the same team as my friends," Tertzanlis said. She hopes to see the current juniors setting the same good examples she saw from the seniors next year. "I miss the game most of course, and just being on the field and hitting on actual pitchers."

Although this season didn't go as planned, there is still plenty of opportunity for the team next year. "I really need the juniors and seniors to be great leaders. The sophomores will need to step up and in quick. We really should compete very well," Tarbutton said. "I hope to see some of the underclassmen stepping up," Schreiner said, "I also hope to see them get back to the state tournament so they can experience the state atmosphere and traveling with the team just like I got to."