Welcome to the most unique start to a school year in Fulton County Schools! While our students have been hard at work engaging in Universal Remote Learning, the amazing team of School Psychologists have been preparing to resume evaluations, consulting and collaborating with school teams, and supporting students! COVID-19 has definitely brought unique challenges to the world of education and school psychology. FCS School Psychologists have stepped up to provide support to staff, students, and families during this unprecedented time. The 2020-2021 school year will definitely be something we all remember. I will always look back and appreciate the wonderful work of these school psychologists. In addition, this talented team has also produced the fall edition of the School Psychology News to provide timely information and resources to our school communities. Enjoy! A big thank you to Evelyn Backa and the Newsletter team for your contribution!

If there are any questions regarding Psychological Services and the great work we are doing, please reach out to me at 470-254-0477 or wojahn@fultonschools.org!

Put on Your Oxygen Mask: Practicing Self-Care for Educators
By: Brooke Maurer, Ed.S

Close your eyes. You are sitting on Delta flight 136, waiting to depart. You are with your favorite person and you are traveling to the most beautiful and desired destination in the world, wherever that is for you. It is a once in a lifetime trip, and the time has finally come to soar through the open skies. The flight attendant stands at the front of the plane and begins reviewing safety procedures. These are the same in-flight safety procedures that you have heard a million times, but this time something sticks out to you. “Ladies and gentlemen, if you are traveling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your mask first, and then assist the other person.” You think to yourself, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. If there is a small child next to me, I am certainly going to help them first. That’s what I do!”

Now open your eyes. You are sitting in your cinder block classroom in front of your computer, mask on, coffee in hand, waiting for your next Teams meeting. You are not vacation bound. Instead you are trying to navigate through the foggy haze of a pandemic that has changed our lives indefinitely. As educators, we are worried about the impact that attending school virtually has on our students. How will they progress academically? How will
they fare socially and emotionally? These are questions that we are all asking. Teachers and support staff are working hard to mitigate negative outcomes as much as possible with extra supports and long hours. But, what about you? How is your mental health? Is your oxygen mask on? During these complex and uncertain times, it is critical that, as an educator, you recognize that practicing self-care is essential. Here are some ways you can take care of yourself:

1. **Reflect on your feelings and needs.** Recognizing and naming your emotions is an important first step. Hello Re-Think Ed Lesson One! Take the time to name your feelings, why you may be feeling that way, and what you might need at that moment. For instance, you might say, “I am feeling very stressed trying to figure out how to create a Bitmoji classroom right now. I need a two-minute break, then I will identify a person in my school who can help me troubleshoot the problem.” It may also be helpful to schedule time to step away from technology during the day. Take a walk around the school during your lunch break, listen to a song, stretch, eat a healthy snack, look at pictures that bring you joy.

2. **Acknowledge moments of gratitude or joy.** At the beginning of each day, write down something you are grateful for on a post-it note. Display them at your desk and watch the notes of gratitude fill up as the weeks go on. You can also share these moments with your students and ask them to share their own moments of joy.

3. **Recognize what is and is not in your control.** There is so much not in our control right now and this can be very anxiety provoking. So, as you sit at your desk and become overwhelmed, think to yourself, “What is in my control and what is not?” As you navigate virtual teaching and the challenges that come with it, one thing you can control is your ability to reach out to students and families to make virtual connections. One thing outside of your control is technology issues students may have.

4. **Practice reframing.** Instead of focusing on the negative, try to flip the switch and focus on the positive. For instance, instead of thinking “I’m forced to stay isolated in my classroom,” say “We are keeping each other safe.”

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Videoconference Fatigue: Why and What to Do About It

By Mark Hartigan

Pre-COVID-19, there were concerns about people, especially children and teenagers, engaging in too much "screen time." Now, during the pandemic, we are engaged in many more online activities by necessity, including remote work and videoconferencing. The experience of so much online screen communication has led to what some have called "Zoom fatigue." Virtual meetings have become a common way for us to keep up with others, receive and deliver services, learn, and work together. However experts warn that not having enough off-screen time can bring on health issues.

It is not uncommon for individuals to be online between five and eight hours a day. Some people have noticed that the level of fatigue generated by online activity often feels greater than what we would feel in face-to-face versions of the same tasks. Why is this?

One issue is our brains can only do so many things at once because there are limits to our working memory. Videoconferencing forces us to focus more intently on conversation and verbal content in order to absorb information. Nonverbal cues that are present in in-person interactions are less available and harder to discern when online. Stephanie Wijkstrum of the Counseling and Wellness Center in Pittsburgh explains that, "Whenever we are having an in-person conversation, we’re tuning in in ways you don’t think about." Wijkstrum adds, “Our heart rates sync when we’re in-person, our respiration. All of this allows us a level of engagement that we can’t have when we are looking at a screen.” When we go on-screen, our brains are looking for the missing link, for the thing that makes human interactions a unique bonding experience. When the brain can’t find what it is used to, this contributes to fatigue.

The relative absence of nonverbal cues in online communication is a major factor in increased stress and fatigue. Our feelings and attitudes are largely conveyed by nonverbal signals such as facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, gestures, posture, and the distance between communicators. In an in-person meeting, we process these cues automatically. On a video chat, we need to work harder to process nonverbal cues.

5. Demonstrate compassion and cultivate community connection. Create a lunch bunch in Teams to stay connected with your colleagues and share stories about your day. Even though we cannot sit together, we can still see each other’s smiling faces. That is what webcams are for! Show kindness to one another with words of encouragement. Send a Thank You note to a colleague for something they have done for you. A small act of kindness and acknowledgement means so much.

Okay, now that you have some tools to help get you through the day, lean back in your chair, close your eyes, and get back on that plane to wherever it is you want to go... Just be sure to come back before your next class starts.

Reference

Reminder
Fulton County Schools offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help individuals who may be experiencing a personal or professional issue that is impacting their well-being. For more information contact:
https://www.mutualofomaha.com/eap/
There is an old saying that when life hands you lemons, make Lemonade. Right now, we have been handed a great big lemon in the form of a worldwide pandemic. It goes without saying that CoVID-19 has presented challenges great and small. It has impacted some families worse than others as well as in different ways - some positively, and some negatively. It continues to have an impact on our children, families, and co-workers. As we move forward, many educators are working hard at making lemonade out of this lemon. We are all searching for ways to help students succeed in these conditions. Looking through two decades of research, as well as stories of educators who have made it happen in difficult circumstances, student growth is possible. There are a handful of factors that distinguish schools where students learn despite adversity:

- Clear mission focused on student learning
- High expectations that all students can learn
- Frequent monitoring of student progress
- Rapid adjustment of instruction when students are stalled OR ready to leap ahead
- Safe and orderly environment
- Strong home-school connection

Research has also shown that teacher effectiveness AND principal effectiveness are the two in-school factors most correlated with learning growth. This is great news as Fulton County Schools are full of effective teachers and principals. While there is no doubt that the pandemic has had devastating effects on many families, a large-scale demographically representative survey by Let Grow nonprofit and market research company, OvationMR, suggests that most children are doing well. Many parents and children are reporting stronger adaptive skills as well as overall improved well-being.

What is not great news is that online learning is not the most effective way to teach students. We all know that face to face learning is best for most students. Our vulnerable populations (i.e., English language learners, those with economic hardships, etc.) tend to experience a much greater negative impact. The students who do well in online-learning tend to be highly self-directed or well-supported. Additionally, students with severe school anxiety, may do better with online schooling. There are certainly two sides to this coin.

So, now what? In the words of our superintendent, Dr. Mike Looney, “Relationships matter.” Student interactions with teachers, in small groups, or one-on-one, and personal interactions AMONG the adults serving each student are found to be the most helpful in building relationships that support students. Student work tells teachers WHAT students know, and the personal interactions tell teachers WHY a student has stalled or excelled.

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This year's theme is "The Power of Possibility." The word "possibility" implies hope, growth, resilience and renewal. Possibility suggests that even something as small as a seed can grow into something magnificent. The word "power" implies that things can and will happen. When we focus on what is possible, we have hope that students will grow, thrive and bloom.

Please mark your calendars and take a moment during National School Psychology Week to acknowledge the contributions of your school psychologist.

(Videoconference Fatigue - Continued from page 3)

cues, which are weaker, at times unclear and, therefore, harder to discern. This process can place additional burden on our attentional capacity and consume a lot of energy.

Furthermore, videoconferencing provides us with more opportunity to become distracted and lose our focus on the content being conveyed. Liz Fosslien, behavioral science author states, “We’ve all done it: decided that why YES, we can absolutely listen intently, check our email, text a friend, and post a smiley face on Slack all within the same 30 seconds. Except of course, we don’t end up doing much listening at all because we are distracted.”

Another contributing factor to “Zoom fatigue” is the screen itself. The light can interfere with the body's Circadian rhythm or sleep-wake cycle, which helps the mind perceive night and day. Also, Janie Fritz, PhD, Director of Communication Studies at Duquesne University notes that having multi-image “gallery” view on the screen can be very overwhelming because it presents too much information for the brain to meaningfully process. Such “information overload” is common to online communication and a reason why an audio phone call at times may seem considerably less stressful.

Looking at a camera brings its own brand of stress. As Fosslien points out, “On a video call, the only way to show we’re paying attention is to look at the camera. But in real life, how often do you stand within three feet of a colleague and stare at their face? Probably never. This is because having to engage in a ‘constant gaze’ makes us uncomfortable—and tired.” In natural in-person interaction it is not unusual to look away occasionally or be mindful of our periphery. In videoconferencing this tends to get shut down because we don’t want to look like we are not paying attention. Then there is the additional stress factor of seeing so much of our own face on the screen during video chat. Staring at that small window of ourselves, we may become overly self-conscious about our appearance, expressions, and how we are coming across. All of this can lead to less-natural communication and fatigue. One additional point about the camera—it restricts our ability to move. On a phone, we can walk around or engage in movement while talking, which research has shown can facilitate thinking.

Lastly, technical issues can add to the strain of videoconferencing. Lost or choppy connections are familiar frustrations. Silence or pauses in real-life communication are typical in human interaction and create a natural rhythm. However, in a video call, silence can be hard to interpret—is the speaker pausing or are they temporarily frozen due to a (Continued on page 7)
How do we avoid the pitfalls of on-line learning?

- Provide connections between the teacher and each student with groups small enough to engage emotionally. Be creative in using the new RethinkEd platform/materials. Teachers do not need to fill the counselor, social worker, or school psychologist’s role. Refer concerns to a team member who can help support staff, students, and families.

- Expand small team leadership by leveraging high growth teachers as leaders so that all teachers are part of a small team getting strong instructional guidance and frequent collaboration.

- Utilize Maslow's hierarchy. The idea that physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being must be taken care of before meaningful learning can occur, is paramount. During the pandemic, the upheaval in families' and students’ lives affects all these basic needs, and educators can help focus on well-being and positive relationships.

- Reflect and write out a communication plan for students who may need additional assistance. Keep the communication consistent and follow through – remember to lean on other professionals in the building to support you and the students.

- Try texting services (like Remind). Keep messages short and sweet. Send out meaningful quotes to help build motivation and persistence. Below are some quotes that Mr. Brian Downey, principal at Northview HS, uses to help keep students motivated and focused on the right things.

- Pick your top three to five tech tools and stick with those. The fewer the tools, the less overwhelmed students (and teachers) will feel.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.</td>
<td>Slow down and get it right the first time.</td>
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<td>Is it a problem or a challenge?</td>
<td>Framing a problem as a challenge can help shift mindset and make problems more fun to solve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the juice worth the squeeze?</td>
<td>Is it worth the time and/or attention? Focus on what will get you to your goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does this need a solution or a cause?</td>
<td>Do we need to solve this right away or slow down and figure out the cause first and then look for a solution?</td>
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“Man in the Arena” by Theodore Roosevelt

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

"You are imperfect, you are wired for struggle, but you are worthy of love and belonging." Brene Brown

(Continued on page 7)
Avoid multitasking. When you go on a videoconference, close any tabs or programs that might distract you. Put your phone aside and try to stay present in the moment.

2. **Build in breaks.** Take mini breaks from video. You can listen while closing your eyes to rest them for a few moments or by simply looking away from the screen. Try to arrange meetings so there is a break between sessions. During breaks, get up and move around, step outside and get some fresh air, have a healthy snack, and hydrate!

3. **Reduce onscreen stimuli.** Hide your face from your view, which can be accomplished without turning off your camera. Additionally, encourage participants to blur their backgrounds, use a poster scene (e.g., beach, nature, etc.), or have everyone who is not talking turn off their camera. If there are audio distractions, silence microphones.

4. **Make virtual social events opt-in.** It is recommended that virtual social sessions be kept opt-in, meaning that people are welcome but not obligated to join.

5. **Switch to a phone call or socially-distanced in-person meeting.** In our current circumstances, many activities must be held by videoconference but, sometimes it may be possible to communicate by phone or safely in-person. Most likely, the other person will be relieved by the switch too!

Equity gaps are huge and there is still a lot to learn about how to make at home school as effective as possible, yet it all starts will relationships.

**References**


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**Wonderful Websites & Awesome Apps**

By Rob Shultz, M.S.Ed.

https://living.aahs.org/behavioral-health/the-benefits-of-play-for-adults/- We know about the importance of play for children to develop essential life skills. But did you know about the importance of play for grown-ups, too?


https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/182 - Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children.
Excellence in Action!
Take a look at what Fulton County school psychologists are doing!

- Claudine Saunders conducted a training for teachers on trauma informed teaching practices at Mimosa ES on January 16, 2020.

- Claudine Saunders co-presented with the Bilingual Liaison, Gloria Hernandez-Hilliard, and Chris-180 Therapist, Bethany Verbrugge, on the impact of poverty on education at Mimosa ES on March 2, 2020.

- During remote learning in the spring, school psychologists continued to support students, families and teachers remotely by checking in with students and families, consulting with teachers and school staff, and participating in SST, 504, eligibility, and IEP meetings.

- Melanie Blinder taught an AP Psychology class at North Springs HS on May 8th. The topic was Social Psychology.

- Jennifer Briskin, Melissa Gordon, Susan Lesh, Brooke Maurer, Mike Nova, Claudine Saunders, Rob Shultz, Andy Underwood, Latressa Walk, Lakisha Wilkins, Pem Wilson, and Nicole Wojahn participated on a committee along with special education staff to develop the COVID-19 Evaluation Protocol. The protocol outlines the procedures to safely conduct evaluations for special education.

- Evelyn Backa, Melanie Blinder, Sylvia Brown, Sally Anna Cohen, Kelly Dale, Candace Hackney, Susan Lesh, Brooke Maurer, Claudine Saunders, Rob Shultz, Alicia Stokes, Cindy Vinson, Latressa Walk, and Lakisha Wilkins participated on a committee to develop a new template for psychoeducational reports.

- Melanie Blinder conducted training for school psychologists on the various features of One Note.

Introducing

The Office of Psychological Services would like to welcome the following new school psychologists:

**Sallyanna Cohen, M.S.**
Langston Hughes ES
Liberty Point ES

**Meredith Case, Ed.S.**
Woodland ES
Roswell North ES

**Jessica Meira, Ed.S., NCSP**
College Park ES
Sandtown MS
Campbell ES

**Leena Khan-Farooqui, Ed.S.**
Centennial HS
Hillside ES

We would also like to welcome our interns who are supporting our schools:

**Emily Lee, M.S.**
Abbotts Hill ES

**Qwatee Williams**
S. L. Lewis ES