



Mourning the Loss of the 2019-2020 School Year is Okay

By Educator Barnes – April 14, 2020

"How are you feeling on a scale of one to five?"

"Honestly, about a two or a three."

That's how I start coaching sessions with my teachers. The longer we have been in sheltering in place at home while schools are closed, the lower my teachers' ratings have been. I always have teachers explain their ratings. The reasons my teachers' ratings have dropped have to do

with missing students, concerns about students learning at home, and missing the events we had planned for the remainder of the school year.

All I can do is problem-solve issues that we can address and say, "It's okay to feel this way." I don't think we are saying this enough. We have to acknowledge that teachers are grieving this abrupt school closure. Teachers aren't alone; parents and students are feeling the same way.

Grief is suffering a loss, and the loss is not always death. We can grieve in other situations. Swiss psychiatrist, Kübler-Ross introduced the stages of grief which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. I have witnessed teachers, parents, and students at various stages in this cycle during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

When schools first closed in Indianapolis, we were told we could return after spring break. I did not have much optimism this would occur. Some people I spoke to were in denial that school being closed after spring break was a possibility. There was also denial that the situation would not be that bad, but it is.

Once the gravity of the situation settled in, anger spewed. People are angry for various reasons. Seniors are angry they are missing out on events like prom and graduation. From K-11, we told these students these events were something they could look forward to doing, and now they cannot do them. Teachers are angry they can't go to school and teach. Some have gone online to express frustration over the expectations that have been put on them from school leaders. Parents are mad they have to take the reigns of their children's education which can be challenging especially if those parents are essential workers and must go to work, have to work remotely, or have lost their jobs.

When it comes to bargaining, a lot of frustration is centered around inequities. The novel coronavirus has magnified issues that many education advocates and activists have been trying to rectify such as technology and internet access for all students. There's been a lot of conversation about what should have happened or what needs to happen to ensure this is addressed permanently. Some families can't access free internet because the company wants outstanding debt paid first. It should not have taken a virus to get the community to come together to make sure all students are on an even playing ground.

Schools provide a safe place for children. It is the place where parents send their children hoping for a better future. When students have to stay home and there are limited resources

such as the internet, technology, or food, it can lead to depression. At school, students who qualified for free and reduced lunch know they'll receive breakfast and lunch, now this is uncertain. Even if a school provides meals, it might get shared with the adults in the home, lowering the amount of food the child gets to eat.

Most educators look forward to standing in front of the class and facilitating learning; facilitating behind a screen is not the same especially when all students might not be able to log on. If they can, they may be embarrassed. Evie Blad [shared on Twitter](#), "I'm moderating an online discussion on social-emotional learning during remote learning. A participant shared a new concern: Some students don't want to participate in video discussions because they don't want classmates to see their home environment." There are students who have crossed my mind every night. I wonder if they are safe. The Indiana Department of Child services [tweeted](#), "Keep our children safe! Call the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-800-5556 if you suspect abuse or neglect." Many times, DCS calls are made by educators who notice something is not right. Who will call now? At least when you see a student daily, you get some comfort. Not knowing is like a stone sinking to the bottom of your stomach.

So, what about acceptance? I'm not there yet, and many people aren't either. It is hard to accept that some students are going to fall further behind because of school closures. It is hard to accept that our students and their families are struggling and there is not much we can do. Students who had the school nurse ensuring they were receiving their medicine or the school counselor ensuring students were attending sessions with the school therapist are now situations beyond our control.

The fear of the unknown such as when school will reopen, what the federal and state accountability will look like, how students will transition to the next grade and if they are prepared, bringing closure for high school seniors, can keep educators, parents, and students up at night. One way to get through this is to mourn this loss and then focus on what we can control. If we don't, we will drive ourselves crazy. Yes, we have responsibilities, but it is okay to take some time and acknowledge how we are feeling.

Administrators, if teachers are struggling, work with them instead of piling more on. Teachers, if parents are struggling, be kind in your responses. Parents, if your children are struggling, be patient. Encourage them. We have to be kind and reach out to each other. Remember each one of us can be in different phases of mourning the loss of this school year, so keep that in mind as we all work through this unprecedented situation.

