



Signs like this could be seen across Chippewa Valley Schools throughout the spring due to the COVID-19. The district's last day of school is next week.

Photo by Alex Szwarc

Chippewa Valley Schools winds down year

By: Alex Szwarc | Macomb Township Chronicle | Published June 9, 2020

MACOMB TOWNSHIP/CLINTON TOWNSHIP — As the school year comes to an end, one local superintendent said it will be remembered for how it finished.

For the final three months of the academic year, the district, like all others around the state, had to quickly adapt in the transition from in-person learning to remote education.

“We ended with a sudden change,” Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts said. “I think it should be remembered for the effort so many people made to give our kids as normal of an experience we could possibly give them.”

He added that parents won't soon forget how the year played out.

“Parents became such an integral part of their child’s education, like they’ve never been before,” Roberts said. “This year, they took on a much greater role.”

A remote learning guide for students and parents sent out by the district in April began with outlining the district’s five principles during the school closure, like wanting to support students to be prepared for the next school year, wanting to be flexible and have reasonable expectations, and continue connections normally made through the classroom.

Students received information through Schoology or Blackboard from teachers about their expectations for the week and what needed to be done.

Schoology is a social networking service and virtual learning environment, while Blackboard specializes in educational technology.

Additionally, students were expected to participate in learning through lessons and activities on Schoology.

During the period of remote learning, no letter grades were given out. Rather, students received feedback on submitted work, and work was graded on a complete/incomplete basis.

Considering the short amount of time given to change from in-person instruction to remote learning, Roberts assessed the last couple of months as very successful.

He explained that the district went through two phases during the COVID-19 situation. The first, in early spring, where school officials thought of the possibility that in-person school could be resumed, then the second phase, when it learned that school would be out for the remainder of the school year.

Roberts said over 1,600 computers were delivered to district students and a K-12 online program was launched.

What made the final quarter of the school year a success, Roberts said, was the collaboration between teachers.

“They all have different strengths and weaknesses, but all worked together to do the best they could under the circumstances,” he said.

Don Preiss, a math teacher at Chippewa Valley High School, said it was tough not being able to directly interact with students.

“It was a difficult adjustment,” he said. “All the communication has been through the internet, so it was hard missing out on interacting with students on more than just their curriculum on a daily basis.”

This year, Preiss taught calculus, accelerated Algebra II, and geometry.

He said the district did its part in ensuring that teachers did all they could do to keep students engaged in new content and instruction.

For several years, Preiss has created geometry lessons that students can access via YouTube.

“During this time, it allowed me to create four chapters of video lessons for my accelerated Algebra II course,” he said. “It’s almost like an online college class.”

In mid-April, the district released a 23-page document titled “Continuity of learning and COVID-19 response plan.”

Chippewa Valley Schools worked with the Macomb Intermediate School District, or MISD, to construct the plan, which included a template from MISD that local districts customized to reflect their own specific circumstances.

“It laid out how we were going to deliver instruction to our community,” Roberts said. “It went beyond instruction, detailing the importance of supporting our kids and families during this time, which is very stressful with a lot of unknowns.”

From a teacher’s perspective, Roberts said, they can’t wait to return to in-person instruction.

“We’ll look back on this as a wild time for sure,” Preiss said. “You got to see the resiliency of administrators, teachers, counselors and students. Everybody had to make the best of a not-great situation.”

Finishing strong

What the district tried to do, in regard to end-of-the-year celebrations, was provide students with a similar experience to what would have been under normal conditions.

A clap out was held May 26 across the district to honor students in transition years of fifth, eighth and 12th grades. For the clap out parades, students and their families could drive around their respective schools.

Also last month, lawn signs and T-shirts were delivered to the homes of 1,339 high school seniors from Dakota, Chippewa and Mohegan high schools.

Roberts took part in dropping off signs, saying the smiles he was met with were rewarding.

“We had to find other ways to develop a sense of encouragement,” he said. “The seniors have lost out on traditions that bring the K-12 education to a close,” Roberts said.

Virtual graduation will be aired on YouTube June 14, with Mohegan’s held the prior week. Usually, commencement is held at the Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre at Freedom Hill in Sterling Heights.

What Roberts wants graduating seniors to take away from the pandemic are lessons of appreciating others, the value of family, and patience.

“So much of our society is a now society, where if you want something, you get in now,” he added. “Another lesson is doing something for the common good. We were asked to stay home to protect ourselves and others.”

Numerous options are being developed by the district on how school will look for the start of the 2020-21 school year.