

School is out for the year – now what?

SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers currently has state-funded contracts to partner with 11 rural schools around the region and provide daily academic and cultural enrichment.

With the recent executive order to cancel school as we know it for the remainder of the school year, our workload just got harder. At this time, SEEDS remains at 100 percent staff capacity and our commitment is unwavering.

Since 1999, SEEDS educators have provided more than 600,000 hours of enrichment to thousands of rural students. Our programming has always focused on creating opportunities for social and emotional learning, hands-on activities and connecting academics to nutrition and the out-ofdoors.

Parents are now faced with increased child care and instructional care responsibilities. Disparities around access and support are more stark than ever and the flat truth is that some students aren't getting the learning time and care they deserve.

Therefore SEEDS is doubling down on our capacity to support our partner public schools in reaching every last student and delivering enriching content to every last mile.

Knowing that not everyone has internet access and not everyone can learn from a computer, the teachers of SEEDS are focused on the development and delivery of lessons that can be selfdirected, are hands-on and encourage people to spend time learning about the ecology just outside their doors.

In a culture already challenged by too much screen time, off-line learning just became even more critical. How will we collectively respond to the current challenges?

Our staff are already

- Supporting food service personnel with distribution
- Delivering printed learning packets with school food service deliveries
- Sharing lessons on multiple platforms that make it really easy for adults to prompt learning and curiosity and that make it easy for students to be self-directed
- Reaching out directly to find out what parents need and what their kids need

■ Partnering with others to deepen and expand access and positive impacts The responses to this unprecedented learning challenge will be localized and locally driven — that means every caring adult can be a teacher who matters. Investing in your kids, your kids’ kids and in kids who live nearby is one of the best ways to invest in a positive future for all of us. The communities of Northwest Lower Michigan have an opportunity to collaborate, to coordinate and to stand out as a region demonstrating effective educational resilience. If we can’t, who can? If we don’t, the costs are incalculable.

Luckily, we’re in this together with excellent administrators, loving families and talented neighbors. For this we are profoundly grateful.

Together we are nothing if not nimble and adaptive.

Let us, a cooperative of interdependent communities, decide to join our strengths and coordinate a response that truly serves *all* of our families and all our learners. And then let’s share what we learn with other schools and districts across the state.

About the author: Sarna Salzman is the founding executive director of SEEDS Ecology & Education Centers, a nonprofit working to provide local solutions to global challenges through ecology, education and community design.



Salzman