

PAIU Leadership Team working with Pennsylvania PBS explains value of partnership in supporting students and teachers

Pennsylvania PBS has been working closely with the [Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units](#) (PAIU) to offer a variety of resources for teachers and school districts as they face challenges with remote learning. A PAIU leadership team was formed to help collect feedback from teachers and develop programs to help support them.

PAIU LEADERSHIP TEAM WORKING WITH PENNSYLVANIA PBS



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In this Q&A session, the three members of the PAIU leadership team will discuss the value of the partnership between PAIU and [Pennsylvania PBS](#) and explain their role in the partnership.

Q: How has the partnership between Pennsylvania PBS and PAIU benefited students, teachers, and school districts across Pennsylvania?

Williams: Something that I think has been huge is that students who may have felt disconnected are now feeling more connected to their schools. That is in part thanks to this partnership. In my districts, they've been hybrid, they've been virtual and there's been a lot of upheaval. I think the work that Pennsylvania PBS is doing with putting out consistent programming and tying everything together statewide has brought a level of stability to the child's learning.

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For example, they can look at the Learning At Home schedule and know what's going to be on TV. The same goes for the teachers. If they know what's going to be on TV and accessible to the students, they can direct their lessons to align with what PBS is offering. Learning At Home is just one example. I think there's a lot that has benefited students, parents and teachers because of the cohesiveness and communicating on a statewide level. Datacasting starting up is another very big component that will also help.

Voigt: A big benefit of this partnership between Pennsylvania PBS and the IUs is just knowing more about what's out there. So many teachers have said, 'I didn't know that this existed on PBS LearningMedia or PBS Kids.' Now that we have this relationship, I feel like we're able to get the word out about all these resources and create new resources to help support our students' learning.

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We've really focused a lot on what the Pennsylvania PBS stations can do together to help the IUs and how the IUs can help them to do that. It could be marketing, trying to get certain services to students, developing programs, professional development for teachers, pretty much anything we can come up with. One thing that's really great about this partnership is how flexible we are as a group, because we're always doing whatever we can to help the students. That's our mission – to help students.

Wilcox Boyles: Honestly, I don't know how it hasn't benefited them. I feel like we should have been working together so much sooner. When we started working together at first, it seemed like in some cases relationships had already been forged between some PA PBS stations who were probably geographically close to an IU, but not on the scale that it is now.

PBS has so many great educational resources, and they've been rocking and rolling in this field for so long. Through this partnership, we've been able to really do a deep dive of all those resources and then share those resources with our districts. Beyond that, we've also been able to collaborate on new projects that are tailored to meet the needs of our students, teachers and districts especially during the pandemic.

Q: What role do you play in this partnership as a member of the leadership team?

Voigt: The three of us on the leadership team have a monthly meeting with Cari and Ron from Pennsylvania PBS, but we also have a monthly meeting with representatives from all 29 IUs. Between those two meetings we exchange a lot of information. We get feedback on different projects and ask what the IUs need, and then we relay that information to PA PBS. On the other side of things, once we work out how we are going to roll out a project statewide with PA PBS, we turn that information over to the IU representatives to share out in their IU. The three of us work together to push it out to them because every IU has a network of curriculum directors, principals, superintendents, and teachers.

We've also been able to connect with teachers and schools individually on getting those resources and working with them to figure out what programs are most appropriate for them. After all, what's needed here in Harrisburg might not be what's most needed at a school up along the New York border or in a very rural area. It's really about helping our colleagues across all 29 IUs find the resources that best meet their needs.

Wilcox Boyles: There's so much noise going on for teachers, that part of my role is filtering through all the resources and things that they otherwise would have to go through themselves. The IUs, and the leadership team specifically, kind of act like a liaison between the schools or even teachers and Pennsylvania PBS to make sure they're being connected to these quality resources. As part of the leadership team, what we've done is we've worked together to coordinate our efforts to take these things that were good in theory and really put those ideas into practice. And they have proved to be viable solutions for our districts.

One reason I became so involved was because the Department of Education asked us to reach out to our local PA PBS stations in the spring. Looking at the map, in Clarion and the districts that I serve, we aligned with WQED, WQLN and WPSU. To help and connect my districts, I had to forge relationships with three different Pennsylvania PBS stations. By doing that, I learned and saw all the amazing resources and projects and documentaries that they had. These are things that were there all along, but I was happy to spotlight and share these with others.

Q: In your opinion, what is one of the most impactful projects that has come out of this?

Williams: Learning At Home would have to be one of the most impactful projects. Coordinating the different programs, pairing them with activities and making it a resource that's all-in-one place is amazing. It's the same all across the state too. I think the stations coming together to create the uniform program schedule was really helpful for students and teachers, because it really provides them with some form of consistency. That steadiness of knowing the schedule ahead of time and knowing what resources PBS already has prepared allows the teachers to prepare a lesson accordingly. That's huge!

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The Grab and Go Bags and datacasting have both also made an impact on students' learning. There are just so many different components of the student and their learning that I don't know that there's ever one thing that made the most impact. It was more the combined impact that all these great initiatives had together.

Wilcox Boyles: There's so many to choose from, but my favorite project would have to be Family Night Coding. In the past, I've helped our region put on annual coding events. This year, because many of our schools are virtual, they didn't know if we were going to have an assembly or a program like we had in the past. Pennsylvania PBS really became our guide on that and created Family Night Coding. For students that couldn't engage in an hour of coding online, they were able to watch this one hour special on their local PBS station that was focused on coding. It was well attended, and it was fun to be a part of all the excitement that surrounded it. This was another project that Pennsylvania PBS really helped us to be able to reach more students and overcome connectivity issues.

Q: How has this partnership with Pennsylvania PBS helped IUs address some of the challenges that schools have been facing with the transition to remote or hybrid learning?

Voigt: Pennsylvania PBS has obviously helped with the connectivity challenges with kids who do not have the internet, are sharing devices or do have internet but because a sibling needs to stream something the bandwidth is low. Connectivity is a challenge for many families, and Pennsylvania PBS has helped to provide a different way for students to get the resources they need whether it's through Learning At Home or Grab and Go Bags. I think the Grab and Go Bags are great way to have students doing educational activities without adding to their screen time, because sometimes there is too much screen time.

"Connectivity is a challenge for many families, and Pennsylvania PBS has helped to provide a different way for students to get the resources they need..."

Another challenge would probably be just getting the word out about these resources initially. The uncertainty is a huge challenge, because it's hard to plan for what's going to happen. At least with Learning At Home, schools and teachers know that it's an option that will be there even if we're unsure about what is next.

Williams: I think one of the challenges that this partnership has really helped teachers overcome is realizing that there's more than just the textbook out there. Teachers are always resourceful, so there's no denying that they would've found something else to use as a resource. Having all the PA PBS resources there for the teachers helped encourage them to use these different resources maybe not just the online ones or the worksheets but also what PBS was putting over the air. It's not just Sesame Street. It's not just Daniel Tiger. This programming has an educational value to it, and I think teachers see that more now. Meanwhile, the students know it's educational, but they see it as something that's a little lighter and more fun.

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It's not just the programming either. A lot of the educational programming was already there, but Pennsylvania PBS stations recognized that they have the capabilities of reaching students that aren't connected or that don't have internet or devices, kids that may have been struggling with the transition to remote or hybrid learning. That's another huge piece of this. They already had this system that we could use to

push out information and resources, so all we had to do was come together to see that we could use their airwaves to really do some good for students and their families.

Q: What challenges do you believe still need to be addressed in schools?

Wilcox Boyles: We do still have internet disparities. If school is remote, the kids have to be able to connect to their teachers. Connecting with them is part of relationship building, but now it's also part of the learning infrastructure. Social emotional learning and engagement strategies are something we're constantly working on as well. A teacher might have engaged the students up to this point, but there comes a time when that activity or that ice breaker stops working. So, they need to find something else to keep the students engaged and coming back. The more tools we're able to have in our teachers' toolkits, the more we can engage the students and continue their learning by meeting them where they're at.

Voigt: I think we're going to see a lot of need for social and emotional support. Students are going to need that support as they cope with maybe the loss of a loved one or just the adjustment of going from being at home to going back into school or possibly being on a non-routine schedule. That's what I think right now, but the future is so unknown that I think we need to be flexible and just be prepared. By building the relationship that we have, I think we've positioned ourselves to be flexible and adjust.

Q: What do you think the greatest aspect of the partnership between PAIU and Pennsylvania PBS is?

Wilcox Boyles: Education is too big to do it alone. We need all hands on deck. I really think the greatest aspect of this partnership is simply the relationship between the IUs and the PBS stations. We're always looking for ways to educate the whole student from social emotional learning to literacy to being a good digital citizen. Working with Pennsylvania PBS has helped us do that by providing these quality resources to lean on, especially during a time when the learning environment has changed.

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Voigt: I think the greatest aspect of this partnership is really just the relationship itself. The relationship we've developed with PA PBS and the IUs is such an important, intangible thing. Being able to leverage our resources and capabilities to bring our ideas to life makes the end product of our projects so much better. It's not just one idea from one type of industry. It's different industries coming together to make the greatest impact we can.

Q: What has your experience been like working with Pennsylvania PBS?

Voigt: I love it! I love that what we're doing is getting out into the hands of our schools and our students. One of the first resources that one of our local school districts turned to when they had an emergency closure was that Learning At Home programming block. Over the break, I received a copy of a school district's plan for their afterschool programs and written right into the plan was Learning At Home and other PA PBS resources. Knowing that it's something that we're doing that really is being used energizes me. It's not just something we created. It's being used and it's being used effectively.

Williams: I love being a part of this relationship and going to the meetings. We have a standing weekly meeting, and they're always extremely informative. There's never a lack of information coming through or a lack of discussion. We always focus on things we need to get done, prepare for what's coming down the pipe next, work through challenges, and support each other along the way. I feel like we're always learning and doing better work as we continue.

Wilcox Boyles: Being a part of this relationship and seeing the resources we're highlighting and creating actually being used by teachers is really fulfilling. Being on the leadership team

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and working at the IU, I've be able to see the projects come together and then be put to use in the schools. Teachers are using Ready Set Music, and they're having kids watch their PBS station, the families engaged with Family Night Coding. I think it's great for our region, for our teachers and for our students.