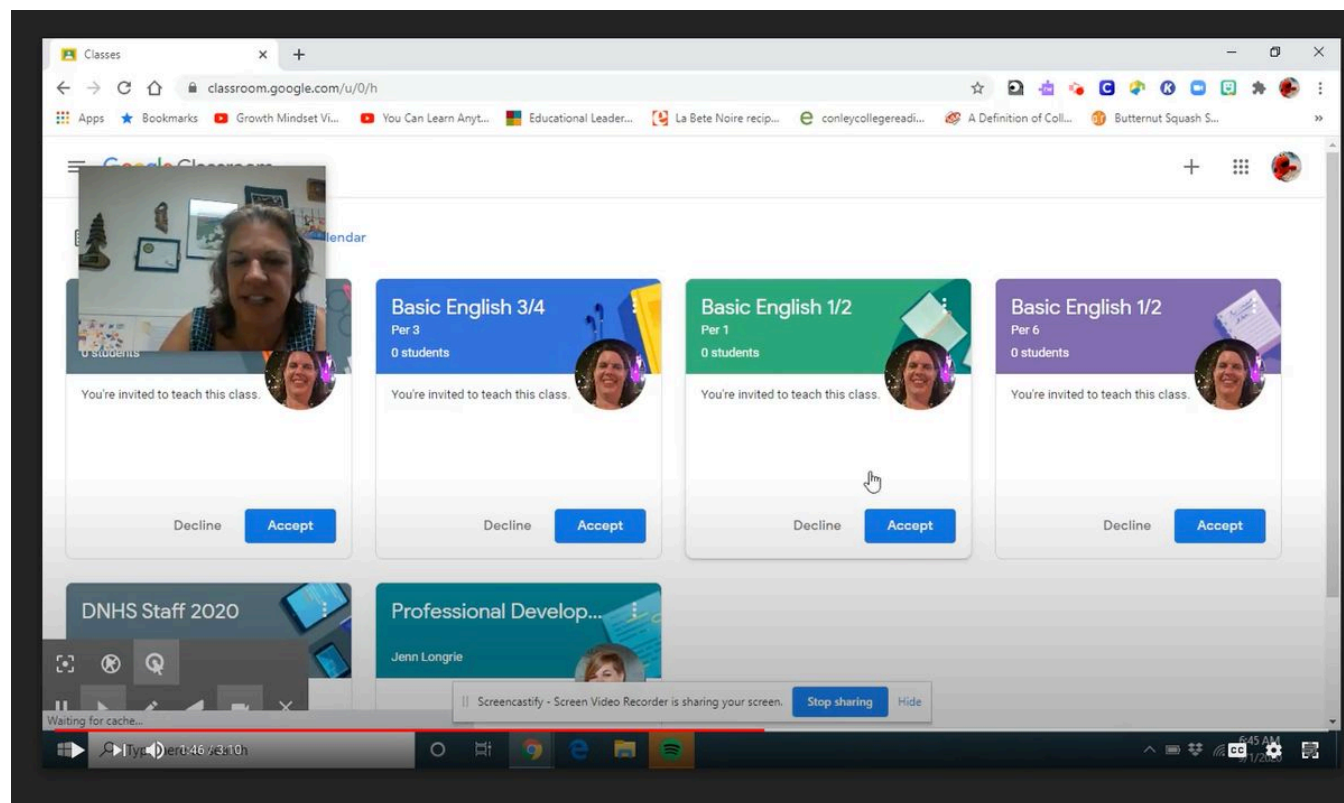


Technical assistance questions overwhelm hotline on first day of school

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School officials expected some hiccups as the student population logged online for the first day of distance learning Aug. 31. However, technical assistance was deluged by parents seeking aid, according to Del Norte Unified School District Superintendent Jeff Harris.

“With 4,000 students on distance learning at the same time, our hotline has been a little overwhelmed,” Harris told the community during his weekly video update Monday, Aug. 31. “In an hour in the morning alone, we had 60 help calls with only four operators on the hotline.”

The administration had set up the number 707-464-7005 for parents to call with questions. Harris still encourages its use even after a high call volume the first day.

“If you can’t get through right away, leave a message. Our guys will be more than happy to get back to you as fast as they can, giving everybody individualized attention and information,” he said.

Harris told the TriPLICATE things were going smoother by the end of day two.

“I’ve been telling everybody, whether they’ve been teaching 30 years or it was their first day ever, distance learning is new for everybody,” he said. “Basically, as of yesterday, we’re all new teachers. While there was some confusion with questions coming from families, by and large, yesterday went well. Today was a little bit smoother. We expect to refine and get better as it becomes more routine, more predictable and it will feel as go on more like regular school.”

Harris updated the district’s status on providing devices for students to log in to distance learning. He said as of the first day, DNUSD handed out 2,200 district devices, leaving a gap of 1,800 students. He added through donations and families with their own devices, about 400 students are still without devices.

Harris said a big culprit for the shortfall was not receiving orders. The administration ordered 300 Chromebooks back in March and April. Of those, 150 were delivered and another 150 that were “lost in shipping,” Harris said.

At end of June and July, the administration ordered another 760 Chromebooks, which were not received by the end of August as promised.

“We’re working with that vendor to get them here ASAP,” Harris emphasized. “If you don’t have one yet, contact your school. There is a waiting list and will be given them out first come, first served.”

He said parents do not have to wait to receive a Chromebook, as class interaction is through Zoom and can still work on any device, be it cell phone, desktop, iPad or Mac.

However, Harris said about 300 students may not have access to the Internet for a variety of reasons.

“We’re working to put parking lot access points out into the community so folks can join in on those,” he said. “There are free locations that have free Internet throughout the county.”

In addition, he pointed parents interested in getting Internet at home for free or devices at extremely reduced costs to find a link to more information on the district’s website at www.dnUSD.org/families.

“Remember, participation is really what we’re basing attendance on. Participation and daily live interaction. Without a device, you can’t do live interaction,” Harris said.

He added one more alternative to logging in through a device is through grade-level appropriate paper packets available for grades K-8, put together by curriculum instruction department.

“They meet all the requirements for your child to meet requirements, independently, at least this first week,” Harris said.

Sharing a bit of good news, Harris said DNUSD has been authorized to continue offering Seamless Summer Meals program free for all children through age 18 through Dec. 31.

“I encourage you to take advantage of this. It’s really one of the best things to come out of federal and state governments for a while,” he said.

To find out more where those food deliveries are happening, go to www.dnUSD.org/food or click families tab at top of dnUSD.org page.