

Students tackle learning at home

Kitchen tables, beds now are classrooms for many

From Staff Reports

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CINCINNATI – Savannah Scott had her sights on prom and graduation since the ninth grade.

The senior had a long lavender dress with roses on the train made before the coronavirus pandemic brought her Cincinnati school’s planning to a halt.

Scott, 18, misses attending classes at Gilbert A. Dater High School, especially since it’s her last year.

“I just miss the whole school environment. My AP teacher and English teacher. My after-school activity (the girls swimming club),” she said.

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus forced schools across the country to adapt on the fly to at-home learning, putting a strain on families and teachers alike.

The Cincinnati Enquirer and Cincinnati Public Radio’s 91.7 WVXU teamed up to sit or phone in with families to find out what a day of learning at home looks like and to share struggles and triumphs.

For Scott, the day starts around 10 a.m. when she wakes to check her assignments on Schoology, an online learning platform.

Even that can be challenging for some.

Students from across the country have reported performance issues with Schoology. Cincinnati Public Schools officials said they’re working with information technicians to expand the capacity of the site to keep up with increased traffic. The only thing standing between Scott and a successful high school final semester is passing her mandatory English

Haddasha said, adding, “I’m just afraid that the coronavirus is gonna get all over the street in Covington and Cincinnati ... and I don’t know what to do.”

‘Goal is to have nothing but As’

Curiah Simpson, cracked iPhone in hand, drew a simple graph on a sheet of notebook paper.

The high school senior had agreed to help her fifth grade cousin with math. Simpson, 18, glanced at photos of worksheets on her phone while seated at the family’s dining room table, marking points on the graph and plotting their positions.

“I love math,” Simpson said. “I just struggle with English.”

The table serves as a makeshift classroom for Simpson and her younger siblings, Destiny Taylor, 12, and R Francis Akorli, 3. R’s counting and coloring worksheets rested on the table near Simpson’s unfinished English homework.

As her family chatted and worked around her, Simpson focused on her cousin’s math assignment.

Because of a learning disability, Simpson qualifies for one-on-one guidance for English lessons.

When in school, a specialist reads aloud to Simpson during English class, then together they read a text a second time before moving on to questions.

“That helps me understand by making the words clearer,” Simpson explained. “Because I sometimes don’t know how to pronounce a word and then it messes up ... what I’m trying to think about.”

Since the closure, Simpson has not had contact with her specialist, though her teacher has held multiple video chats each week with the teen.

credit this semester, she said. Then she'll be off to the University of Cincinnati- Blue Ash to study pre-health.

She described most of her teachers as being responsive, especially her AP teacher who she said is “techy.”

After checking on assignments and her AP psychology calendar, Scott normally chills, watching TV and YouTube videos until the evening, when she feels the most productive.

“I prefer to do it later on,” Scott said of her homework.

‘I’m afraid that the coronavirus is gonna get all over the street’

Haddasha Revely-Curtin, the middle of three adopted girls growing up together in Newport, Kentucky, has been confronting heightened anxiety.

At about 11:20 a.m., the 12-year-old settled in on mom Rose Curtin’s bed for a history lesson, an iPad and a blue pencil at the ready atop her blue lap desk. This is part of the family’s routine, with Curtin serving as an impromptu educator.

Haddasha listened as Curtin read aloud about ancient Roman culture, her reading punctuated by the occasional flip of a page from the packet sent home by Haddasha’s school, Newport Intermediate.

Curtin, an editor for an academic journal and, until it closed, a part-timer at a local yarn shop, adopted Haddasha in 2010. Curtin said she’s encouraging Haddasha to read more, but the previous weeks have been difficult.

“We have to do kind of a triage,” Curtin said. “You do this much, and it’s not going to be everything.”

At one point during Thursday’s lesson, Haddasha’s voice rose as she pleaded with Curtin to skip a section on gladiators’ enslavement.

“I know, I know, OK, listen,” Curtin said. “Haddasha, I know you don’t do stuff about slavery so we can skip the parts about slavery if you need to, OK?”

Simpson is dually enrolled in the Mount Healthy school district and Cincinnati’s Great Oaks career and technical education district. Reva Cosby, the Mount Healthy superintendent, acknowledged the difficulty of providing special education services during the closure, but the district is “trying our darndest” to stay in contact and provide needed support for students with disabilities.

“There will be some things we can’t do,” Cosby said. “If (we) can’t get it done, we understand a child may be eligible for compensatory education, and that’s what we’ll do.”

Before helping her cousin with her math homework, Simpson viewed her current grades on her laptop.

“Her goal is to have nothing but As,” said her mother, Lakresha Alexander.

She’s nearly met her goal: all As and one B, in English.



Sisters Destiny Taylor, 12, and Curiah Simpson, 18, do homework at the dining room table in their home in North College Hill, Ohio.
MEG VOGEL/CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

A few minutes later, Haddasha started skimming the packet for answers.

Reading on her own has been difficult for Haddasha. The virus has sapped not just hospital systems and economies but Haddasha’s capacity for concentration.

“I’m really scared right now about the coronavirus,”