

Families adapt to homeschooling

Closures around US bring new struggles, triumphs

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Cincinnati Enquirer USA TODAY NETWORK

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WVXU

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’m a cool person so I’m cool with a lot of people,” she said. “I just miss the whole school environment.”

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. With education upended, journalists from The Cincinnati Enquirer and Cincinnati Public Radio’s 91.7 WVXU teamed up to sit or phone in with several 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.

The only thing standing between Scott and a successful high school final semester is passing her mandatory English credit this semester, she said. Then she’ll be off to the University of Cincinnati- Blue Ash to study pre-health.

“What I’m trying to show them is learning is still fun, and just because we’re doing it in a different place doesn’t mean that it’s not a priority,” Emily Minelli said. “I just want them to keep a joyous outlook about learning.”

2:40 p.m.: In search of a laptop

“What does the frog eat?” asked Renee Oliver, whose second-grade son stood next to her. “Does it eat flowers? Flies?”

“Flies!” said 7-year-old Sinaca Wagoner Jr.

The exchange marked the start of another reading lesson, which was sent home by Sinaca’s charter school, Cincinnati College Preparatory Academy. Sinaca and every student in the school are considered economically disadvantaged by the Ohio Department of Education.

At first, Sinaca offered to read, but then turned to his mother for help.

The day had already been busy. Oliver and Sinaca’s father drove their son and their 5-year-old daughter, Keylah, all over Northern Kentucky in search of a laptop for the boy.

While other districts provided Chromebook laptops to all families, Sinaca has relied on his mother’s phone for online reading lessons. Sometimes while reading, he’s interrupted by calls tied to Oliver’s work cleaning apartments.

“Sinaca would be able to focus more” if he had access to a computer like he did in school, Oliver said.

5:10 p.m.: ‘Nothing but A’s’

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

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

As for homework, “I prefer to do it later on,” Scott said. “It’s better for me.”

11:20 a.m.: Tough concentrating

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 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 parttimer at a local yarn shop, adopted Haddasha in 2010. Curtin said she’s encouraging Haddasha to read more, but the weeks have been difficult.

Noon: The joy of learning

It was a few minutes after lunchtime and the Minellis had already ticked off half their to-do list.

Princeton High School French teacher Emily and her husband, Mark, spend their weekdays switching between their full-time responsibilities as parents and workers plus his studies in graduate school. They’re also taking on the tall order of being stand-in teachers for their kids.

“It’s really hard to fit it into the day when he’s trying to work, and I’m trying to work,” Emily Minelli said.

Before noon, Emily Minelli had already built online content for her students, graded their schoolwork and taught literacy through the video conferencing tool Zoom to a group of her colleagues’ kids.

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.

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, the specialist read 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 said.



Sisters Destiny Taylor, 12, and Curiah Simpson, 18, work on their school work at the dining room table. MEG VOGEL/CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

Throughout the week, about a dozen of her colleagues get together and rotate teaching their kids a lesson from a range of subjects. On this day it was Minelli’s turn to present an attention-grabbing reading of “Creepy Pair of Underwear” as she took a stab at teaching literacy.

She said her family has planned out every hour of their school day but are trying to be flexible with their sons.