

Lesson plan for virtual learning

Household uses music, technology to enhance remote schooling at home

PANDEMIC’S EFFECT ON A FAMILY

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Whether it’s in a schoolhouse or at the Santiago family’s house, a lunch break is still holding its value.

When the 40-minute breather comes around, Bryan, 16, usually puts on rock or pop songs and jams. Sometimes he breaks out in an arm wave – a popular breakdancing move, from his workstation at the dining room table.

“It gets me right back into my next classes,” Bryan says of the musical sessions, adding that it keeps him engaged in his school work.

To his younger sister, Julia, who is sitting a few feet away at a learning area brought together just for her online education, her brother’s dancing is “embarrassing.”

Julia, 10, usually tells him to be quiet – she starts school later, so she’s still working. But when her break time slides around, she lip-syncs or sometimes does popular TikTok dances.

Do they ever dance together?

“No,” they say.

The siblings’ recess reprieves will likely continue as the close-knit family of Filipino descent keeps up virtual instruction, even though the Mount Vernon City School District is expected to move toward some inperson instruction in November. The family’s decision to continue



Parents Jose and Norma Santiago with children Julia, 10, a fifth-grader at Columbus School, and Bryan, 16, a junior at Mount Vernon STEAM Academy, at home in Mount Vernon Sept. 25. PHOTOS BY TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS



Fifth-grader Julia Santiago, 10, at her work station at home in Mount Vernon on Sept. 25. The Mount Vernon City School District

online learning from home was made with an eye toward flubbed school reopenings across the country.

“So, there are schools in other states that opened and had a rise of the COVID-19,” says their father, Jose, who stays at home with the children. “So, Bryan saw it. Julia saw it on the news, too. ... And because of the risks, they know that it’s maybe a time for them to just go with the 100% online schooling.”

Their mother, Norma, a nurse who works at night, says the children didn’t like it at first. They wanted to see their friends. But now they understand the importance of being safe.

For Julia, virtual learning has left her feeling “very lonely.” She misses recreational activities such as stepping, a dance form used commonly by many Black sororities and fraternities. It involves rhythmic stomping and clapping, which is far too disruptive to do in the house. Instead, she’s spending more time with her brother and watching anime.

When she first started online learning last semester, the fifth-grader says she would get headaches because she wasn’t used to the choppy work online. Today, the quick-witted student is running into fewer problems because she gets to see her teachers more.

A high school junior, Bryan says his teachers are understanding of the challenges of learning in a pandemic. But that doesn’t take away from the sense of anxiety he feels when he’s missing out on a class because of daily technical mishaps on his school-issued laptop.

“It’s really bad when you’re not in the know beforehand,” he says. “Because, like, you suddenly panic. That’s the thing – well, for me.”

Still, more uncertainty abounds because the teen doesn’t know exactly how his virtual instruction will be impacted when some students return to the physical classroom.

“Do (instructors) go into the building and teach the class, and then the rest of the remote people are just looking at the camera from a laptop?” he ponders. “And then the others are just spaced out on desks?”

Time will tell.

started the year with virtual classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Jose and Norma Santiago unpack meals provided by the Mount Vernon City School District as for their children Oct. 5.



High school junior Bryan Santiago, 16, works on an assignment as his sister, fifth-grader Julia Santiago, 10, works at her station at home in Mount Vernon on Sept. 25. The Mount Vernon City School

District started the year with virtual classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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