



## Construction Projects Get an Early Start



The renderings above show the Maine West entrepreneurial lab (top), the fine arts studio at Maine East (center) and the foods lab at Maine South (bottom).

While much of the country has slowed to a halt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, District 207 has taken the opportunity to start the construction projects earlier than anticipated since students and staff are not in the physical buildings to comply with state and federal guidelines. Rather than starting work in May, the projects moved forward in April with safety modifications to comply with Centers for Disease Control and Illinois Department of Public Health guidance.

District 207 will complete upgrades to all three high schools during the next several years. The improvements include classroom renovations, safety upgrades and the replacement of outdated plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems.

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The Board of Education recently approved many of the contracts related to work that will be completed during Phase 1, which runs through the spring of 2021, for a total of approximately \$79 million.

Residents can stay up to date with all construction related information by visiting the district’s website at [www.maine207.org/construction](http://www.maine207.org/construction). In addition, each school has a video showcasing the changes at each high school and there are also video renderings of major work being conducted at each school. Those videos are located at [www.maine207.org/video](http://www.maine207.org/video). ■



# Implementing E-Learning with Integrity and Fidelity

**Nearly every school district in the country faced a major challenge in March when COVID-19 caused school buildings to close: how does learning continue when students and teachers are at home?**

For many districts this was a major obstacle. However, since District 207 has one of the most robust e-Learning programs in the nation, that transition had few bumps in the road.

“We have been implementing cloud computing for more than 10 years, so we have teachers who are as well-prepared to facilitate student learning in a virtual environment as anywhere in the country,” Superintendent Dr. Ken Wallace says. “That preparedness is possible for many reasons, especially because of our unique coaching model in District 207, where every teacher receives yearlong, instructional coaching.”

As Google’s first K-12 partner, District 207 has built a technology support system for students and teachers. This includes each student and teacher being provided a Chromebook and any student internet connectivity issues are identified in an annual survey of families. If there are challenges, students are provided with an internet hotspot to solve the issue.

“While we are connecting over devices, our top priority has been to connect on a human level,” Dr. Wallace says. “We want to make sure our students are doing well on a social and emotional level first and foremost. From there, we have given our teachers permission to try new things to help students learn. We know this is not perfect but we have tried to establish an ethos with our teachers and students around the spirit of learning.”

**While there are challenges to e-Learning, there are also many benefits according to Innovative Adult Learning Coordinator Jill Geocaris.**

“There will be a lot of good that can come out of this experience,” Geocaris says. “For students, e-Learning is a lot more flexible so they can go at their own pace and they can get more individualized support. I believe this will lead to stronger development of executive functioning



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*Teacher Mason Strom holds class over video conference while he and his students are all at home.*

skills and they will be more self disciplined and able to better self manage their work.”

Geocaris says teachers have done a magnificent job working collaboratively, sharing approaches and exchanging ideas, all with the goal of helping students. “We are holding collaboration sessions frequently and the teachers are supporting each other with problem solving and new ideas,” she says.

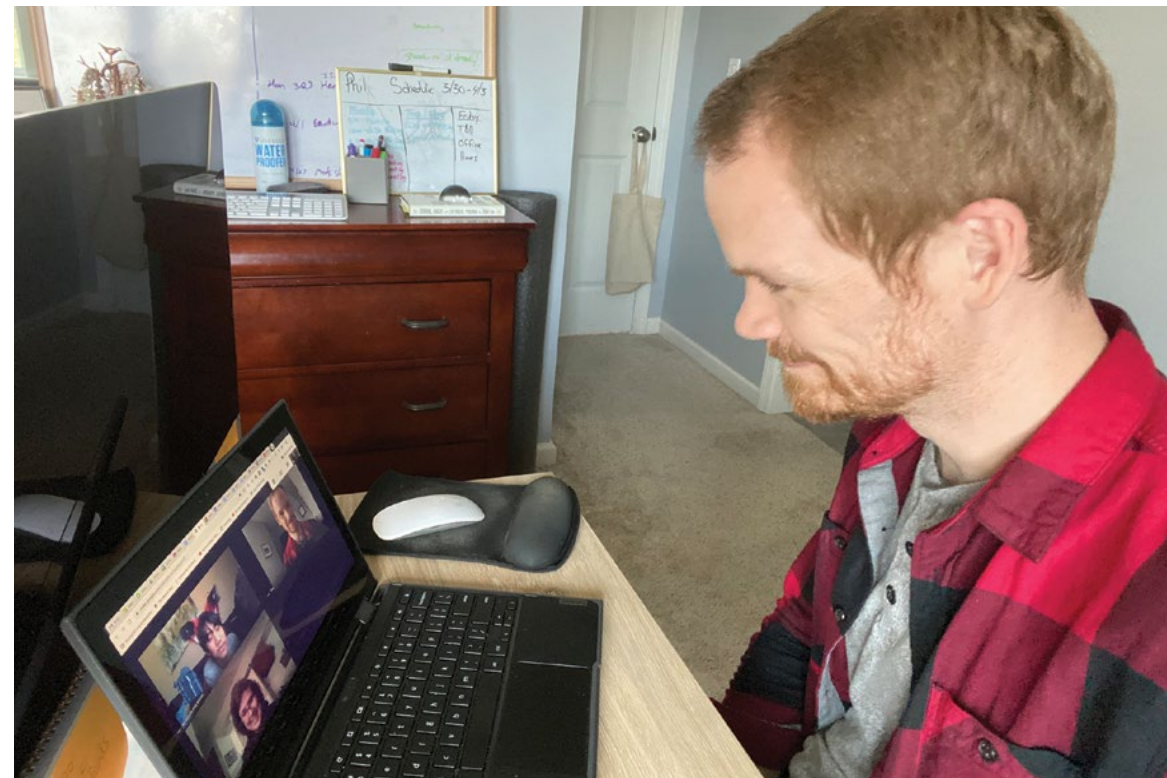
“They are learning things so quickly and really digging into the work so they can reach students in very meaningful ways.”

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Innovation Shawn Messmer echoes Geocaris’ thoughts around the benefits of e-Learning for students.

**“This is a great opportunity for students to experience what e-Learning is, and I believe whatever they choose to do after high school, they will be better prepared for it because of this experience,” Messmer says.**

Messmer shares that the main goal is engagement with students. “The teachers are asking, and we are discovering, the best ways to keep students connected to their school community and learning while not being in the same room,” he says. “School is their world for eight hours a day for 13 years. For as long as they can remember, they have been coming to a physical building and engaging with teachers and each other. Since that has completely changed, we have to figure out how to keep the connections and learning going. We are solving those challenges every day.”

“The ability that e-Learning has to personalize a student’s educational experience is probably the most powerful aspect of the approach,” he adds. “So our challenge is, when we come back face to face for school, how do we honor that and blend the two systems to benefit students. We are going to work on that during professional development days at the end of this school year and over the summer to ensure we are providing the best education possible for our students.” ■



*Teacher Phil Ash discusses a project with several of his students as part of a video conference while the school buildings are closed but e-Learning continues within the district.*



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*Assistant Principal Michael Wartick distributes gift cards to District 207 families in need.*

## Providing Support to Students and Families

During the COVID-19 pandemic that moved teaching and learning from inside the school buildings to an e-Learning format, there were many other additional impacts on District 207 students and their families. The administration determined early on that food and supplies for District 207 families would be a main priority and implemented several initiatives to help families.

**District 207 distributes meals to families in need twice a week. Due to a partnership with the local elementary school districts, families are able to pick up food Monday through Friday.** Several days' worth of food is provided to families. In addition, local organizations have donated feminine products and food items that have been distributed to families. Approximately 8,000 meals are being provided to families from District 207 each week.

**In addition to distributing meals, District 207 is raising money for families in need so they can purchase food and household items.** The money raised is being used to purchase \$50 gift cards that are distributed to families so they can purchase the items they most need.

To date, more than \$80,000 has been raised from the generous donations of staff, parents, community members and others.

**TO DONATE**  
[www.bit.ly/207strong](http://www.bit.ly/207strong)



*Staff member Andre Kennedy organizes meals to be distributed to families.*

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