WELCOME TO DISTANCE LEARNING AS A “GOOGLE FOR SCHOOLS PARENT” 101

Unofficial tips from a once not-so-savvy parent who struggled to figure out what my kid is supposed to be working on.
First, a heartfelt “Thank you”

Our appreciation has no bounds for the efforts and caring the teachers and staff have put forth to ensure students continue their schooling during the challenges we’re all facing.

We’re also grateful for the technology the school has in place and is using to provide a virtual learning experience.
Becoming a Distance Learning “Ninja-Parent”

If you’re like me, you’ve never sat in front of a Chromebook and aren’t familiar with the Google for Schools suite of applications.

Something that takes me seconds in Microsoft Word like formatting has rendered me an idiot in Google Docs.

I thought it might be helpful to some parents to illustrate how to avoid the things I did and maybe pick up some tips that I’ve learned about our school’s Distance Learning environment.
LESSON – 1

DISTANCE LEARNING

Oh, the joys have been plentiful!
We just want to help the kids with school

How do I help my kids understand what they need to do?

"Trust but verify." How do I make sure the little buggers are doing their work?

How do I help teachers stay connected with my kids?
My first mistake...

“Hey son, can you show us how you look up your assignments online because doing the work is not optional in our house?”

“Sure Dad, just click on “View all” in each of my classes.

Unfortunately, he didn’t know (a.k.a. forgot what he was likely taught) about the most efficient ways to use the tools available to him and we wasted a bunch of time, missed a bunch of things, and let’s just say things got a bit uneasy. Sound familiar?

I manually created lists of assignments by copying & pasting from what was presented in the “View All” link of each of his classes and then prioritizing them for him.
This feels like mental math all over again

It wasn’t that long ago when the world of math rendered me ignorant overnight and I was no longer the Master! Now I’m trying to figure out what tools the school uses and how to become a Master overnight.

Good times, good times...  ugh
I figured, learn from the past.
Use this “new” math to solve for X

FYI, X = My patience

\[
X = \frac{\text{# of kids} \times \text{# of teachers} \times (\text{# of applications} + \text{websites}) \times \text{# of known communication vehicles}}{\text{# of computers available} - ((\text{my OCD} + \text{my ADHD}) + (\text{my work})) - (\text{unknown communication vehicles})}
\]

Extra credit: Determine why people bought as much toilet paper as they did, and why I didn’t?

Nope. That didn’t help.
My second mistake...

“Hey Bud, I just took a quick look at your Gmail Inbox and you need to clean it up!”

In my haste, I didn’t read each of the emails he had, I only took note that he had hundreds of un-read messages at the time and assumed that he’d know which he needed to pay attention to, READ, and act accordingly.

What I didn’t realize was that to him “clean it up” meant “delete everything without reading it so there’s nothing in the Inbox”.

Clearly, email hasn’t been a significant influence on what he does with his day.
New approach needed

Once I got past the fact that he emptied his Inbox AND Trash I started with breathing exercises, meditation, and a coffee refill...

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And the wisdom to know the difference.
I spent a few moments exploring his virtual school world on my own and it was spiritual...
Really should’ve consulted this guy before “helping” my kid.

If you’re reading this, you can read.
Tips #1 & #2 – Don’t be afraid to explore

In Google Classroom...

Tip #1 – That “Calendar” link takes you to the kids Google Calendar which receives information feeds from each of his classes in Google Classroom.

Tip #2 – That “To-do” link takes you to a list of aggregated assignments sorted by when they’re due.
Tip #3 – Students should learn to love their Gmail Inbox

The Gmail Inbox is a critically important aggregation point for everything!

Beyond email that teachers are sending, Google Classroom will automatically send the student an email when a teacher...

• Posts an assignment
• Sends a “private comment” to a student about an assignment
• Makes an “announcement” in the blog forum of a class.
• When an assignment has been graded.
• Etc., etc., etc.

All these posting examples also generate emails.
Tip #4 – The Google Calendar is Your Friend

The Gmail Calendar receives a feed of “assignments” from Google Classroom. Also if your teacher sends out an invite to an online session, if they’ve sent the invite out via the students email addresses, it will show up here as well.

You may be asking “Why do the assignments look different”? Those that are highlighted have an “all day” time duration in the “appointment” settings of the calendar entry. Those that just have a “dot” next to them have a “less-than-a-day” duration. For example, the assignment/meeting is only an hour.

Heads up! A teacher may be identifying a due date and “time” in the text description of the assignment but not identifying the “time” in the Google Classroom assignment so that appointment shows up in Calendar as an “All Day” meeting.

A thought: It would be super helpful if there was a “time” that an assignment was due that time would be used to create the Classroom assignment/meeting. The assignment/meeting only needs to be 1-minute in duration. That way things appear in the Calendar in the order they’re due.
Tip #5 – A Class isn’t showing up in “Google Calendar”

In the event one of your student's classes isn’t showing up in their Google Calendar there’s a few things you can do on your own to fix it.

**Step 1.** Select the “v” under “Other calendars” and make sure the class is listed and has a check mark next to it.

If the class is listed and “checked” proceed with **Step 2** ->

**Step 2.** Go back to Google Classroom and select the missing Class from the Classroom homepage

**Step 3.** Select “Classwork”

**Step 4.** Select “Google Calendar”

**Step 5.** Google Calendar will open and present the following pop-up. Select “Add”.
Tip #6 – Changing the color of Calendar feeds

You can change the color of the Calendar feeds to match the color of the Class in Google Classroom. It just creates a consistent experience. i.e. Blue = Science, Green = Religion, Social Studies = Yellow, etc.
Tip #7 – Trust-but-verify

To verify assignments have been “turned-in”...

Step 1 – Click on the class name to open the “class page”

Step 2 – Click on “Classwork”

Step 3 – Click on “View your work”

Step 4 – Observe the assignment status.

It’s important to know that just because an assignment has been “Turned in”, that doesn’t mean it’s been “Graded”. A teacher might come back with “Personal Comments” requesting a revision or may make draft comments to the assignment that requires further action by the student.

The easiest way to know that a teacher requires additional work to a “turned in” assignment is to keep an eye out in the Gmail Inbox for a relevant notification email.
Final thoughts

• My kid’s school Gmail account needs to become as important to him as my work email and calendar are to me. It’s worth spending time showing a kid how to navigate Gmail and do simple things like create folders to keep class-specific email organized.

• Google Calendar has several views and can be printed as a tangible “to-do list” that we both can reference.

• As with most things technical, there are typically several ways to do something. Share what you think might be helpful to others.

• The fact is, my kid doesn’t have a cell phone yet and has no idea how to do a lot of things on a computer. Patience, patience, patience!