



## East Valley SD, WA

### School Bus is Hub of Community



#### CONTACT

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The state of Washington announced that schools will be closed until the end of the school year. The COVID-19 crisis has caused school districts, as well as the world at large, to come up with solutions to a rapidly changing forecast and very little answers in sight. Truly uncharted territory. There are no experts in this field and the playbook is being written as we're going along.

Lorri Smith, Transportation Supervisor at East Valley School District in Washington recognizes her district, and more importantly, the Yellow School Bus, to be at least one constant in her community. As such she is working with her Administration to come up with ideas on how to put to use that reassuring resource.

One idea that has yet to be fully vetted is not only using her buses as a hot spot, but potentially as a way for students to connect with their teachers. Doing schoolwork from home can be a challenge for students who may struggle in class to get the help they need. And without reliable Internet at home or Internet at all, connecting with teachers to ask questions isn't an option, and in addition, libraries aren't even open as a resource.

Families need a safe place to go. So, if there is a bright yellow school bus located in a safe area where there is not only Wi-Fi, but possibly a rotating teacher or two to help answer questions, that may just be a solution. Or at the very least maybe provide a district telephone for a student to connect that way with their teacher.

"The school bus is the hub of what families need" says Lorri. Her office has become a terminal of communication. Families aren't sure what the next school year is going to bring now. Typically, enrollment for your kindergarten age child would happen in March, but now families aren't sure how to do this, so they call the transportation office because they see the yellow school buses out in their communities bringing food, homework, or hot spots.

One of her ideas for enrollment is the secured lock box located on the outside of the transportation facility. Potentially parents could drop off their enrollment forms or their forms for free and reduced lunches since school buildings themselves are not open.

Lorri is at least a comforting voice on the phone for parents to feel connected. She communicates their questions to principals or secretaries who can get back to them with the right information. And her message to her community is to just call. "If you can't get to us, we will get to you."

In addition, she recommends to other districts to call around to companies who supply hot spots or other resources. She's found many who are willing to help out by reducing their costs.