GUIDING QUESTION:
How the heck are we gonna make it through this year?
SHORT ANSWER:
I don’t know but here’s what I think are the TOP TEN things we need to be doing and thinking about to survive and thrive.

Disclaimer: I know I’m the edtech guy but this is not really an edtech presentation.
Focus on the kids but...

It sounds cliche but this cannot be overstated during times like this.

Every conversation, idea, strategy, action or decision should be about how to improve the learning experience and support the health, social, emotional and academic needs of our students (in that order).

BUT! And this cannot be overstated either.

We cannot forget about the needs of the teacher AND the parent/guardian either because without their voice at the table, their mental and physical health, and their commitment and support, we have nothing.
Don’t be afraid to fail.

In fact, not only should you not be afraid to fail, you should model how to own it, celebrate it and show how you are learning from it.

Bottom line, we are ALL going to fail this year and it will likely be from trying something that we’ve never tried or encountered before.

And that’s OKAY! Flip the narrative, adopt and evangelize the growth mindset throughout your learning community and turn this perceived weakness into your superpower.
Think outside the box.

What worked before won’t necessarily work this year. Ask yourself and your stakeholders, what should/could this look like in OUR new normal?

- Student Cohorting
- Scheduling
- Staffing
- Professional Development
- Curriculum & Instruction
- Engagement
- Assessment & Grading
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Special Education/Related Services
- Technology
- Sports and Clubs
- Field Trips/Assemblies/Special Events
- Facilities & Food Services
- Physical & Mental Health
- Transportation
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Work in draft mode and embrace the fact that the plan is never going to be final.

Change is the only constant.

Create a process for your school/district to continuously survey, reflect, and redesign your plan along with your stakeholders. Remember, everyone is a teacher AND a student right now.

This is hard and it WILL get uncomfortable but you will get the plan right quicker than if you stay ALL IN on the original plan.
Remember we are not social distancing. We are physically distancing. There’s a difference.

We all know that relationships are the bedrock of teaching and learning and they are difficult to develop and cultivate when students and teachers are separated by distance or the veneer of a screen.

Build time into each day for your staff and students to connect and engage with each other, remotely or otherwise, and make sure you and they do it with meaning and purpose.
Be transparent and communicate. Then communicate again. With everyone.

There is no such thing as oversharing when everything is complicated, everchanging and hard to remember.

Send out weekly blasts/hold Q & A’s connecting your stakeholders to a living document that shows them the plan and the changes you’ve made to it that are based on their feedback and reflection.

Constantly praise and show gratitude for the effort people are putting into this.

This will go along way to building trust and buy in from your stakeholders.
Not all remote learning is the same just as not all remote learners are the same.

Everyone needs something to make it work for them and sometimes they don’t even know what that something is.

First, listen.
Then empathize.
Then learn.
Then be creative and collaborative in finding the equitable solution that’s right for that student (or teacher).
Be present and lead the learning.

Use a tool to keep you and your staff connected to one another in real-time (not email or text messaging).

This fosters a sense of community, teamwork and a feeling of “we are all in this together”. It allows for a free flow of information including sharing professional development articles and videos, posting common problems and solutions while it also gives opportunities for you and your staff to add some necessary levity during stressful situations.
You cannot do this alone.

Look inside and outside your district for partners to help you with...

- Staffing -> Volunteers, PTO, Churches
- Professional Development -> State Associations, Universities, Free Online Providers, YouTube, Your Own Teachers
- Curriculum & Instruction -> Open Source Providers, Adaptive Tools & Existing Online Resources from Your Publishers
- Technology -> Local Businesses, State Associations, Universities, Regional Service Providers
- Facilities -> PTO, Ed. Foundations, Churches, Town DPW’s, Recreation Departments
- Physical & Mental Health -> Town Public Health Departments, Clinics, Hospitals, Local therapists, Online Providers
- Transportation -> Parents, Recreation Departments, Churches
Take care of yourself and each other.

There is a famous meme on social media that says something like this:

“They’ll post your job vacancy before they publish your obituary.”

It should be followed by:

“If you can’t take care of yourself, then how can you take care of others.”

The reality is that we should be taking care of ourselves AND each other. Stay connected via text, group chat, Saturday Coffee Clutch.
Stay Connected

Connect with me:
festag@njrps.org
@ErskineSchool
@NJECC

Connect with smarter edtech people than me in NJ via GroupMe:
http://www.njecc.org/remote-learning-resources-for-covid-19 corona-virus-school-closures/

Connect with one another (PLC):
Facebook Groups I love:
Principal Principles
Principal Life
Any questions? Any answers?

Tell everyone to get used to you saying:

Subject to change.

To be determined.

I don’t know.