



A Snow Day or Global Pandemic?

By Madison Soukup



"I can't believe we haven't had a snow day yet this winter," I said to Rachel in late February. Growing up in Wisconsin I have become accustomed to having at least one snow day every school year, so it's been a sad winter with no big snowstorms or sub-zero days. "But on the plus side, at least we don't have to reschedule our Farm to School lessons," Rachel replied. As Farm to School Specialists teaching nutrition and agriculture lessons in the Madison Metropolitan School District the lack of snow days has really been a blessing. We haven't had to reschedule a single lesson or worry about how to meet our AmeriCorps goals.



Let's jump ahead a few weeks - it is mid-March and the coronavirus is quickly spreading across the world. At first it seemed like a faraway illness, affecting those in China. Next it's in Iran and Italy. Then cases start popping up in Washington and California, so it doesn't seem so far away anymore. At this point I start to worry about what happens when it hits Wisconsin, because at this point, it's inevitable. If schools close, how will we teach our lessons? How will we hit our AmeriCorps goals? How will I complete my 1700 service hours working from home?

Everything happened so fast. On the afternoon of Thursday, March 12th, we are entering Emerson Elementary School and being asked a series of questions about our recent travel history and how we're feeling today. Friday morning, we have to fill out a travel and health questionnaire with the school district. Nobody knows how long schools will remain open. Teachers don't know if they'll see their students next week. Later that afternoon, Governor Evers orders all Wisconsin schools to close until April 6th. The following week, April 6th turns into indefinitely.

Now two weeks later, my daily work life is completely different. Working from home has been an adjustment, especially because 75% of my time used to be spent teaching students in elementary schools across Madison. The first week was filled with developing contingency plans to continue our service and reach the students of Madison with our Farm to School lessons. We don't know if we'll ever be back in the schools, so we plan for the worst but hope for the best. My coworker Rachel had the genius idea of creating a [Teleschool Kit](#) that would contain all of our lesson materials, video recordings of our lessons, and family friendly recipes to do at home.



We quickly put together all of our materials and published them to our Farm to School Facebook page and emailed them to all of our teachers. The teachers have been grateful and excited to share the materials with their students. Our posts have been shared many times on Facebook and met great enthusiasm from our Farm to School community. And we aren't done. We have plans to create cooking videos, exercise videos, and lessons for older students and adults. In this time, we aren't going to sit around going through the motions; we are going to prepare materials to bring everyone a little more joy and education during this uncertain time. I am proud of our resiliency in the face of such great adversity.

I texted Rachel our first week of work from home and said, "I wish we had just had 5 snow days." It's funny how just a month ago we were grateful for the lack of snow days, so we didn't have to rearrange our schedule and now we may never be back in the classrooms. In life you never know how things are going to work out. Right now, I'm just grateful for my health and this immense learning opportunity.

In addition to the service described in the above reflection, Madison has also been supporting the efforts of Granjas a Familias as part of her service during the COVID-19 pandemic, which she describes below:

Granjas a Familias or Farms to Families is a collaborative effort between REAP Food Group, Roots for Change, and Rooted; all nonprofits in Madison, WI. The goal of this project is to purchase locally sourced food items like produce, grains, and proteins, specifically from minority farmers, and distribute them in food bags to Latinx families struggling with food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis. We have enrolled 200 families in this program and have secured funding to provide food bags through October! I have been so happy to be serving in this new capacity and truly giving back to the Madison community during this difficult time.



