

WQLN Homeroom: Learning Brought to Life

WQLN just began a very exciting and *new* educational initiative, one that I believe will benefit all of our kids who are now learning at home. But before I can tell you about our new project, we will need to time travel back to April 1953.

This is when WQLN's first board of directors met to figure out how to use a "brand-new medium" – something called television - to aid education. TVs were suddenly popping up everywhere! Back in the 50s, TV was new, very exciting, and full of endless possibilities. No one serving on WQLN's original board had any broadcast experience, few owned a television set, yet this group of community leaders, which included an attorney, a banker, two teachers and a priest, were broadcast visionaries. Like most visionaries, they were attempting the impossible. They were trying to put a new educational television station on the air at a time when there was only one public television station in the entire country, only one commercial television station in the city of Erie, and the FCC had just frozen all applications for new broadcast licenses. This was the spring of 1953, and in the spring of 1953, *hope had feathers*.

Actually, *hope* had lots of feathers back then, because it took 14 years before WQLN-TV 54 signed on the air for the first time on August 13, 1967. In those long-ago dog days of summer, perhaps the most significant accomplishment of WQLN's board and small staff, was to get WQLN-TV into nearly every one of Erie and Crawford Counties' classrooms, just in time for the start of the new school year.

Fast forward to today. The world is different, and so is WQLN. We broadcast more - a lot more. Today WQLN broadcasts four television channels, including PBS, Create, World, and the PBS 24/7 Kids networks – plus our radio station 91.3FM. But as different as our business model is today, one thing hasn't changed - our dedication to our founders' core belief that television can be used to benefit the education of every child in Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Last month WQLN premiered *WQLN Homeroom*, a four-hour block of educational enrichment television programming produced to help kids continue their education while at home due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The big challenge with distance learning during this crisis is its dependence on a student's ability to access the internet. Broadband connectivity is a luxury, which is either unaffordable or unavailable to many in our area. Limited internet access has become a real concern for local school districts. But television solves both issues because it's free and available everywhere.

WQLN Homeroom airs on WQLN PBS 54.1 every weekday from 8:00am to noon. *WQLN Homeroom* features local teachers from school districts in Erie, Crawford, and Warren Counties. Each class is 30 minutes long beginning with PreK/Kindergarten, followed by first through sixth grades and then a special science, music, or art lesson geared for all elementary school age kids at 11:30am. *WQLN Homeroom* teachers are

clever and their instruction is very engaging – seriously, fourth grade math is more entertaining than a television game show.

Our new schoolhouse is big - it's as big as the WQLN broadcast area. But the classroom instruction is small in a way that one teacher working with one student is small. But when you think about it - that's pretty big too, isn't it?

I encourage all parents and caregivers to watch *WQLN Homeroom* sitting beside the young learner in your home. It's only 30 minutes, but just imagine the impact those 30 minutes may have on your child's education – not to mention a newfound appreciation of all of our local educators.

Will *WQLN Homeroom* be perfect? No. It can't be. Not from the beginning anyway. But WQLN is committed to making our television classroom as close to perfect as possible. None of us knows how long the pandemic will last and because of the "on again and off again" possibility of school closings, *WQLN's Homeroom* will continue through the summer and into the fall. Beside adding *WQLN Homeroom* to our broadcast schedule, WQLN will continue to make valuable educational resources available on our website, at www.wqln.org under the *WQLN Learning at Home* tab. It's here that parents can unlock PBS Learning Media, which up until a few weeks ago was only available to teachers, and PBS Kids apps, puzzles and games.

All of us at WQLN applaud our teachers and their very supportive school districts. These educators are today's visionaries, because they see a better tomorrow through the education of all of our kids.

Tom New
President/CEO
WQLN PBS/NPR