

Technical Support Tech – Work From Home Proposal

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From: Department 518, Technology, Technical Support Techs

To: Milwaukee Board of School Directors

During the first quarter of 2020, MPS employees were allowed to work from home, in support of social distancing guidelines, related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of that experience, including feedback from numerous coworkers, it was clear that the job duties of a Technical Support Tech (TSC), could be performed entirely from home. TSC assists staff and students with technical issues by phone, email or chat. Since the equipment TSC uses and the assistance TSC provides is IP based, all TSC job duties can be completely performed from a remote location. The following proposal will explain why, moving forward TSC employees should be granted the option to permanently work from home. To clarify, this proposal specifically relates to the job duties of a Technical Support Tech and does not directly advocate for the inclusion of any other departments or teams.

The MPS Remote Work Acknowledgment Form details employee work-from-home guidelines. The Form was completed by all employees, who requested to work from home, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. TSC would like to continue to use The MPS Remote Work Acknowledgment Form as a contract, because the Form provides procedures TSC would like to utilize as a blueprint. For example, remaining accessible and acknowledgement of the employee being “responsible for providing space, telephone, printing, networking and/or Internet capabilities at the telecommute location, and [that the employee] shall not be reimbursed by the employer for these or related expenses.” In addition, TSC realizes that we should return to the workplace in the event of equipment failure.

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Additionally, in order to work from home, all MPS employees were required to complete a Work Plan Template, used to track an employee's daily tasks. TSC employees also completed the Work Plan Template. However, TSC actively uses a computer application, which tracks daily tasks, in real time with much more accuracy, called Mitel Ignite. The

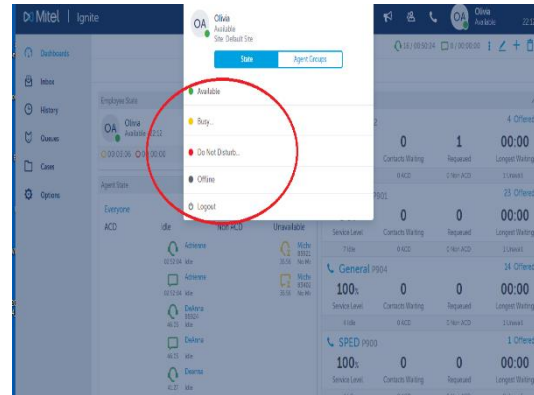


Figure 1: Mitel Ignite

application monitors, manages and tracks TSC calls/emails/tickets. Mitel Ignite also logs employee start/end times, breaks, lunches and availability. So, submission of a Work Plan Template would not be necessary. Similarly, TSC associates also communicate meetings, schedules changes and appointments via the Technology Support Center shared calendar in Outlook.

The article “Wisconsin Gov Pushes for Remote Work, New Citizen Portal”¹ by Jule Pattison-Gordon, describes how government recruiters at the state level, recognize there is an opportunity to boost recruitment by allowing employees to permanently work from home. The article also states there is an opportunity for government employers to, “keep up with the private sector, which is expected to continue permanent work-from-home opportunities.”¹ The job market is very competitive, so offering diverse benefits is vital to any organization, in order to consistently attract and maintain employees. Carolyn Gregoire explains in the article “Working From Home Is Good For You And Your Boss”², that research indicates that the highest performing workers excel in a work-from-home environment. The article also goes on to explain that, “...employees who were able to decide when and where they worked enjoyed an improved quality and quantity of sleep.”² So, research supports the idea that workers are more productive and comfortable, if they are provided the option to work from home. The

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benefit of increased productivity and a more relaxed worker, increases overall production and the overall health of the worker.

The chart below details possible WFH concerns that leadership may have, as well as possible solutions:

Possible Concerns	Solution(s)
-Inter/departamental TSC in-person requests -Home equipment failure	TSC members will return to the jobsite if necessary
Start/end times, breaks, lunches	TSC uses a computer application called Mitel Ignite to track availability, in real time
Equipment access	During the height of the pandemic TSC was able to utilize a mix of work equipment and personal devices (monitors, keyboards, etc.). Desks phones and along with other equipment, were provided. TSC Staff should already have the necessary equipment to perform their work duties.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of 2020, the goal was to minimize exposure by social distancing, in order to combat the spread of the virus. In 2021, that goal is still in place. More than a year after the pandemic, MPS still has measures in place, throughout the entire Milwaukee Public School system, which require departments, staff and students to social distance: i.e., wear masks, remain 6 feet apart and frequently wash hands. An article on the TMJ4.com website called, “Milwaukee Public Schools announces virtual option...”³ explains some staff and students for the 2021-22-school-year will remain completely virtual. In other words, MPS has continued to provide options to combat illness, i.e. 2020-2021 teaching staff received Wednesdays off when in person classes resumed in Spring of 2021. As well as, students and staff who returned to school, near the end of the 2020-2021 school year, were required to wear masks. In essence, there is still a concern to combat the spread of the virus. If those measures are still in place, then eligible employees, those who are able to completely perform their job duties remotely, should be offered the option to work from home, which would match current social distancing efforts.

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TSC would like to mention that parking for all staff, in the entire building, at the Milwaukee Public Schools Support Center is scarce. During the regular school there are not enough parking spaces for staff and some are forced to park on the streets, while adhering to the City of Milwaukee parking restrictions. For some that means, possibly parking several blocks down the street.

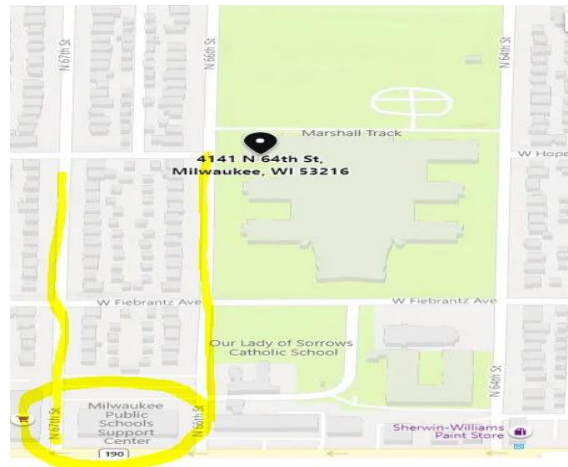


Figure 2: Map Near the MPS Support Center

Likewise, there are a few designated parks for visitors, but even some visitors have referenced the lack of available parking. If there were fewer employees reporting to The Support Center, then more parking spaces would be available for visitors and staff.

Many City of Milwaukee employees returned to the office June 21, 2001. Those workers had been working from home for over 1 year⁶. City of Milwaukee workers who returned to the office were required to wear masks. Although most employees returned to the office, the City of Milwaukee currently has a pilot program in progress, in order to determine the success of a permanent work from home option. Likewise, Aurora Health Care allowed, “non-clinical ... employees who have been working remotely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic ... [to] continue to do so permanently...”⁵. Eligible Aurora Health Care employees in Illinois and Wisconsin are able to work from home. The Aurora Health Care, Director of Human Resources made the decision to allow eligible staff to work from home, because of the success of the work-from-home experience during the pandemic. In addition, the Director explained that employees conveyed, that they enjoyed working from home. Also, employers like Goodwill Industries and ManpowerGroup have introduced flexible work options to its employees.⁵ According to <http://www.flexjobs.com>⁴, based on recent job openings, several organizations have recently offered

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employees the option to permanently work from home including companies like: Lambda School, Microsoft and Nationwide insurance.

Work-From-Home Benefits	
✓	Competitive benefits that compete with the private sector
✓	Minimize workplace exposure to airborne illness
✓	Increased productivity
✓	Increased employee health – research shows employees who work from home get more sleep and are more relaxed

Information to consider about the TSC WFH 2020-2021 experience:

1. Less sick days were requested
2. Better start times (no one was late/stuck in traffic)
3. Productivity remained the same
4. Availability, including breaks and lunches were tracked
5. No notable technology challenges were reported
6. Feedback about the work-from-home experience from TSC staff was positive

In conclusion, TSC would like to reiterate that our job duties can completely be performed from home, because the services we provide are either by computer or phone. And because our job can be done completely from home, we would like to request to permanently work from home. TSC worked from home during the pandemic and had no issues accessing any of the tools needed to perform any job duties. Moreover, fewer sick days were requested and there was a positive increase in the number of employees who reported to work on time. Technology Support Techs already have the equipment necessary to work from home. TSC also understands that other teams may request assistance with various tasks. For example, there may be a request that TSC assist with inventory. So, a Technology Support Tech would notate their location on the TSC Outlook calendar and then report to whatever location needs assistance. Furthermore, based on recent job offerings after the pandemic, many

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employers are now offering flexible work options. Feedback from employees and the success of remote work during the pandemic were deciding factors with many employers like Aurora Health Care and the City of Milwaukee. Like many other companies including MPS, because of the pandemic many changes had to be made, in order to accommodate staff and to ensure a safe work environment. Employers like the City of Milwaukee and Aurora Health Care recognized that remote work could be permanently extended.

In addition, TSC understands that the task of managing work-from-home activities and or repeatedly assessing the specific job duties of a subset of workers can be challenging. So, we would like to advocate that the management of TSC work-from-home activities, be ultimately passed along to the Director of Technology, who would be able to precisely assess the needs of the department and immediately recognize any changes in workflow.

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References

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³TMJ4 Web Staff, “Milwaukee Public Schools announces virtual option for 2021-22 school year” 09 JUN 2021, <https://www.tmj4.com/news/coronavirus/milwaukee-public-schools-announces-virtual-option-for-2021-22-school-year>

⁴Courtney, Emily, “Companies Switching to Long-Term Remote Work”, 2007-2021, <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/companies-switching-remote-work-long-term/>

⁵Anderson, Lauren, “Advocate Aurora Health will make remote work permanent for 12,000 employees”, 21 MAY 2021, <https://biztimes.com/advocate-aurora-health-will-make-remote-work-permanent-for-12000-employees/>

⁶Lemoine, Bret, “Milwaukee city workers return, buildings reopen after 15 months”, 20 JUN 2021, <https://www.fox6now.com/news/milwaukee-city-workers-return-buildings-reopen-after-15-months>