

FEATURE TEACHER

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What is a challenge you have faced teaching in during a pandemic in 2020?

The one major challenge I have faced that I am still having issues with is reaching students who are not attempting any assignments. As a leadership team, we worked with our counselors to create a Google Form to submit students we felt were in danger of failing our courses. This allowed the counselors and administrative staff to organize the data and recommend our most high-risk students to the MTSS program. This program began this year and is being implemented to help our students achieve proficiency in both academics and behavior.

How do you support building a positive and safe online learning environment for your students?

My students know they can message me at any time or call me with any questions. I provided lots of encouragement and direct instruction at the beginning of the school year to increase student confidence in using Schoology. I only use technology that has been investigated by me and I know is high-quality and functional. Discussions are moderated on Schoology also.

Do you have a super awesome success story from 2020?

Spring was a very challenging time for me and many other teachers. I enjoyed watching students continue to meet my learning challenges even when they knew the grades were not being counted against them. I had students participate in nature collections, scavenger hunts and send me brilliant photo evidence of their science investigations. It made me happy that my students still wanted to learn Biology even when we were separated and remote learning.

What do you do to encourage online classroom participation?

I am attempting screen recordings this week for the 2nd time this year. I hope that by viewing these videos students feel more connected to the classroom while they are remote learning. I have also been using Nearpod as a presentation tool that allows me to "flip" my classroom. Nearpod offers many features that allow students to draw their answers, view embedded videos with stop points and questions, take quizzes, etc. By offering lectures at home, I am able to use my class time for more inquiry-based activities. The students enjoy doing lectures this way so they can do lab work at school.

Parent Communication... What's working for your families?

I use Schoology to send both updates and messages frequently throughout the week. In addition, I am available for phone calls every Friday. I have made a few phone calls this year when needed.

What methods have been effective in teaching during a pandemic?

Inquiry-based learning during in-school days with front-loading of essential vocabulary and lectures during remote work days.

During the past 2 school years, I had modified my Biology courses significantly into a more inquiry-based, group work design to increase student engagement, interest and achievement. This has been very successful and I am still trying out ideas since we are unable to physically work in small groups this school year. I have been incorporating small-group discussion applications in Schoology and have found that very successful so that students can share ideas in a safe way.

Additionally, I purchased mini-lab caddies so we can safely complete lab activities individually using both desk and lab space without sharing materials.

Science is discovery-based, so it is integral to me that I provide my students with as many safe lab experiences that are possible.

Share something positive about teaching in 2020.

Teaching in 2020, on a blended model, has made me stretch my idea about what is truly meaningful and relevant learning. I have really attempted to eliminate any assignments I don't feel are essential to each unit. My students are also becoming extremely proficient in using technology to complete and submit work. 2020 has made me focus on reflecting on my teaching and how I can improve my remote and in-person classroom to increase student achievement.