October 23, 2020

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5th Grade Teacher at Mabscott Elementary

*Picture from 2019-2020 School Year

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

"The biggest challenge I faced in 2020 was when we first went out in March with no warning or knowledge of expectations. This is something that teachers have never faced, and all of the sudden we had to figure out how to contact our students, teach them, and learn how to do this without seeing them!

This was not easy. I had 34 students, and our first zoom meeting, we had 4 show up. My co teacher and I went to work. Our students would be moving on to middle school, to a new building, and we wanted to make sure they were ready.

First we set out to contact all of our students. Some of our students did not have working numbers, we could not find them. We took on the role of detective, calling parents jobs, going to apartment buildings, calling everyone on the emergency list until we got ahold of each and every student.

After this, we had to figure out how to get the students devices! We had about 11 who did not have a way to join the meetings. I put it out on social media, and had more than enough devices donated. We delivered them, the students were so excited!

Next, was the issue of the internet! Now, they have a device...but they cannot use it. We called different companies to figure out if we could get students on the internet. We showed parents how to connect the device to their cellphones. Over the span of about 1 month, we had all 34 students attending daily meetings!

We had to keep them encouraged, so we called local restaurants and asked for donations. We were able to do a weekly drawing for perfect attendance, and give out McDonalds, Wendy's gift cards, and free Pizzas. Each week we would drop these off in our students mailboxes. We also did incentives in which our students were able to torture us! We had ice-water dumped out on our heads, and I was even egged on by my kids in a zoom class.

What started out as a complete shock and sadness, turned into our class of 2020 becoming so close and going through this pandemic together."

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

"The number one thing is attitude. The students feed off of the attitude or vibe I put out. No matter what I think about a given situation, I try to make it lite for them. In 5th grade at Mabscott Elementary, we always read Harry Potter, last year we finished 4 of the books (two of them virtually). We are not able to do that in the classroom this year due allotted time.

My co-teacher and I decided we would have a weekly TEAMS meeting and read Harry Potter as an entire group on Fridays, virtually. This has been wonderful! Both Group A, and Group B from both rooms attend, and we also have full time virtual students who join us. This allows us to feel like an entire 5th grade again, and allows the students to interact with their friends that they have not been able to see since March.

After we read, we play games, this helps us to build a community.

All of their online learning is monitored by both teachers. Anytime we have a team meeting we make sure that both of us are in the classroom to ensure student safety. One teacher teaches, while the other teacher monitors the chat and answers student questions and takes attendance. TEAMS gives teachers the ability to call student IPADS if they "forget" to login!"

Do you have a super awesome success story from 2020?

"My biggest success is definitely being able to adapt to this new way of teaching. Everyday we are faced with new problems, new resources, new expectations, new rules... Learning how to not lose my mind in a fluid situation has been key.

I listen to my students, parents and colleagues and learn from everyone around me. If something isn't working, I try to find a solution, I ask for help, I offer others help. The biggest success for our county in general is the ability to work as a team!

This year I have found that sometimes I have to scrap an entire lesson, and sometimes I am able to fix the problem. Learning that it is okay to not be the perfect teacher this year has been key."

What do you do to encourage online classroom participation?

"I teach elementary school. ... getting the students motivated has been pretty easy. MINECRAFT EDU I have learned to play, and we have created worlds together. If they get ALL of their remote work done, we earn extra time to play in our world.

 I also send home a weekly grade sheet. This included grades for remote work, in class work, and assessments. This helps parents understand where the students stand with their grades. Due to the pandemic, and the two day in the building schedule, it is extremely important that students stay on track and complete their at home assignments."

Parent Communication… What's working for your families?

"Emails, phone-calls, tutorials, and students weekly grade-sheets.

Students have had access to their gradebook for quite a few years, but this year it is important for parents to understand exactly how the grade is calculated. This way everyone knows how important it is to do remote work. Remote work accounts for 33 % of their overall grade. The other grades being classwork, and assessments.

Our parents at Mabscott have been great! Parents were having a hard time navigating through schoology for students who chose to come to school, so I created tutorials showing them what to look for. We also have parents who chose the virtual option for their students. Tutorials were created for them as well, showing them have to navigate the WVVS platform. We reach out to our virtual students, every week to make sure they are staying on track.

Before school started, our Principal, Dr Weis, made sure that our entire staff was on the same page. This helps parents with multiple students. If each course is designed similarly, parents can easily learn how to navigate. Consistency has been key this year."

What methods have been effective in teaching during a pandemic?

"Using a checklist to keep everyone organized.

Making tutorials for parents and students, a lot of people learn visually.

Using notability and apple pencil! This keeps social distance in place, and I am able to teach from a distance. I can upload slideshows, and resources to notability, mirror to my board, and use my apple pencil for instruction.

Teaching lessons on the two days we are in class (doubling up on reading and math) and having students do their computer work, and homework for the lessons taught on remote days, no new instruction on remote days, this way the students and parents are not overwhelmed.

Finding time for a 30 minutes fun activity to keep spirits up and the kids smiling! We have painted on canvases, wrote spooky stories, completed mystery science lessons, learned fractions with M & M's and learned the history of our own names so far this year!"

Share something positive about teaching in 2020.

"The smaller groups allow for more personal relationships with students. It is easier to help students learn new concepts. The students are so excited about being back in school, it's hard to not smile when they've missed their school so much!"

Check out her videos on YouTube and specifically the [Schoology Tutorial for Parents](#).