

We asked teachers what practices they adjusted for the pandemic that they plan to continue next year. Their responses indicate three significant shifts:

1. Increasing the frequency of doing bonding activities
2. Aggressively mitigating contagions
3. Embracing more technological tools

DOING BONDING ACTIVITIES FREQUENTLY

In a prepandemic classroom, some teachers relied on spontaneous interactions to build community. These teachers planned few activities to create bonds among the students. In prepandemic times, teachers didn't have to work as hard to build relationships with students and their families. Remote and blended learning decreased spontaneous interactions. To make up for that loss, teachers added more bonding exercises into their lesson plans. They also devoted more time to get to know their students and their families.

They discovered that these bonding activities made a dramatic difference to the culture of the class. Even though returning to face-to-face instruction will increase spontaneous interactions, most teachers want to continue intentionally providing ample opportunities for bonding. They figure that if they successfully built a strong learning community remotely, the rapport will be incredible when they see each other daily and plan bonding activities.

Some favorite bonding activities include:

- daily emotional check-ins
- doing "show-and-tell" activities even at the high school level
- writing personalized emails and notes to students and families
- starting lessons with ice-breaker activities
- incorporating calming community activities such as stretching, listening to music, and manipulating playdough at regular intervals
- teaching skills for improved inter-

personal relationships

- providing time for students to chat
- doing virtual home visits
- using bitmojis to get to know each other

MITIGATING CONTAGIONS

Teachers would like to focus more on promoting a healthy environment. In prepandemic classrooms, contagions such as lice, strep throat, stomach bugs, and the common cold ran rampant through classes. Teachers who saw students at least partially in person noted that common ailments decreased dramatically this year. They attribute the difference to being extra vigilant about keeping germs at bay. Several teachers reported only going through one box of tissues!

Students with mild illnesses may be asked to stay home to prevent spreading contagious bugs to others. Many teachers plan to continue aggressively mitigating contagion by sanitizing desks, enforcing frequent handwashing, and changing their attendance policies. No one wants to see a child suffer because a classmate came to school when they could have stayed home. Updating the attendance policy becomes practical now that teachers know how to use technology to support students at home.

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Up until March 2020, teachers could teach incredible lessons using minimal technology. However, not using technology stopped being a viable choice with distance and blended learning. More teachers are technologically savvy than before the pandemic, and most plan to continue embracing EdTech tools.

They discovered that EdTech tools helped overcome obstacles such as access, logistics, differentiation, engagement, and data gathering. Responding teachers plan to continue using video conferencing, learning management systems, and assessment and curriculum platforms.

Using so many digital resources significantly reduced the amount of paper students used. Teachers found that they preferred fewer papers because they didn't have to carry and

keep track of so many things. These teachers also appreciated spending less time at the copy machine creating packets. Students, though, are a little sad that "the dog ate my homework" is less believable when the homework is digital.

ZOOM, MICROSOFT TEAMS, AND OTHER VIDEO CONFERENCING APPS

Video conferencing solves many logistical issues and allows for a mix of in-person and remote participants. Few teachers want to teach remotely all the time, but they like that students can attend virtually when circumstances prevent them from attending in person. On the other hand, many people are less pleased with the development of districts canceling snow days in favor of "remote learning days."

Teachers mentioned how they prefer video conferencing for parent teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, and staff meetings. It reduced transition time, allowing teachers to keep a tighter schedule. Transportation, childcare, and mild health problems are no longer barriers to participating.

PEAR DECK, NEARPOD, AND OTHER INTERACTIVE APPS

Teachers noticed that interactive apps improved collaboration and engagement. They said that the relative anonymity enhanced the quality of several students' work. Class clowns spent less time distracting their peers, introverted students felt more comfortable sharing, and struggling students asked for help more. Some favorite interactive apps include digital whiteboards, quiz games, video sharing, bitmojis, and social media.

GOOGLE CLASSROOM, SCHOLOGY, CANVAS, AND OTHER LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Many more teachers started using learning management systems during the pandemic. They liked that students had increased access to the curriculum and content. Some teachers even plan to continue videoing their lessons so absent students and those wanting a review can access them. Teachers found that posting content on an LMS

reduced the amount of time tracking who did what when. They liked that the LMS allowed motivated students to find what they need without teacher assistance.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT PLATFORMS SUCH AS CASTLE LEARNING, EDOCTRINA, AND EDINSIGHT

Knowing that teachers were overwhelmed during the pandemic, many more districts signed up for robust curriculum and assessment platforms. Teachers cherished the ease of creating practical computer-based assignments and assessments. They especially appreciated the ability to deliver differentiated assignments without other students knowing. Several platforms integrate with an LMS so students can access everything from one place. Students liked getting immediate feedback, and teachers liked saving hours of grading time. Faster feedback is an important element for improving student learning.

Having a bank of premade questions available made it easier for teachers to give frequent formative assessments. Testing platforms and data reports help district leaders make data-driven decisions whether state testing occurs or not.

Data reports about student learning are another large bonus of these platforms. Teachers were able to identify individual and group needs immediately and adjust instruction the following day. These data-driven instructional decisions improve student learning. Data reports about student needs are also a key element of fidelity to the Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS).

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES NEVER COME EASY

The pandemic left scars. However, returning to prepandemic practices would be a mistake because it would eliminate the lessons that adversity taught us. Planning bonding activities, limiting the spread of germs, and welcoming more technology into the classroom are three of many practices that teachers expressed interest in maintaining.

Applying lessons from the pandemic will take some effort, but students need it now more than ever. At Harris Education Solutions, we supply EdTech tools that offer valuable insights and save time to support educators and drive student growth.

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