3 INSTRUCTIONAL QUESTIONS:

To Ensure Your Staff Is Ready For What's Next in ~~Learning~~ Remote Learning

Written by: Chad Ostrowski, M.S. Ed.

INTRODUCTION:

Why Is This Important?

The truth is, education has seen more changes in the last year due to Covid 19, emergency remote learning, and scattered plans to return in the Fall, then it has in the last 100 years. We've had to re-think what learning is, we've had to scramble to allow learning to continue with closed school buildings, and now we have to **re-design what learning is** and can be.

In talking with schools, districts, and educational offices at the county and state level across the country, many school leaders and administrators are laser focused on the logistics of social distancing and the physical presence of students in the classroom. This focus, while absolutely understandable and necessary, has left many forgetting about the actual instruction and experience learners will have in the context of classrooms, and it doesn't change the fact that **we need to rethink our instruction** whether classes will be remote or in person.

As an instructional leader, it is paramount that while you deal with the question of how students will return, you also ask of your educators "what will learning look like for them when they get here or log in? "

To help guide this discussion, we will breakdown **3 fundamental questions** you can ask your staff that can ensure that they are set up to be successful regardless of how the educational landscape changes in the future. We want our teachers, administrators, and support staff to be ready for any scenario, so that they themselves and the learners they serve, can thrive.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS:

The truth, is we just don't know:

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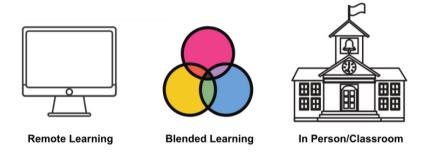
As an instructional leader it is paramount that while you handle and deal with the "how students will return", that you ask of your educators "what will learning look like for them when they get here or 'log in' "

To help guide this discussion we will breakdown 3 fundamental questions you can ask your staff that can ensure that they can be successful regardless of how the educational landscape changes in the future. We want our educational professionals to be ready for any scenario so that they themselves and the learners they serve can thrive.

3 OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLS:

There are essentially **3 possible scenarios** schools will have when reopening. Depending on circumstances, government decisions, as well as community needs, one or potentially all 3 of these scenarios could take place during the upcoming school year.

Remote Learning   **Blended Learning**   **In Person/Classroom**

Fully Remote:
Students attend all school remotely from home most often supported by computers.

Blended / Hybrid Model:
Students attend school in person on a split schedule, spending some time in the classroom but also learning remotely from home . The week is "split".

Live / In Person:
Students attend school in person on a consistent schedule with social distancing guidelines in place as needed.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

Chances are, we won't have much say in when or which model gets utilized in our schools or districts. It will depend on day-to-day or week-to-week information, recommendations from the CDC and other government officials, and data specific to our local communities. This makes it even more important to **CONTROL WHAT WE CAN**.

While focusing on logistics and the "how" school works, we also need to focus on what the instruction looks like when students get there, and what there experience will be like. This, as far as we know, will be the **"new normal"** and we need to adjust our instruction to meet its needs.

There are **3 Instructional Questions** that can help you prepare your staff for any or all of these scenarios. By following these principles and setting a foundational level of expectation your staff and their instruction can thrive in any environment or scenario presented.

These 3 questions can also **create consistency in learning** that can allow students to continue learning even if the environment changes, while avoiding additional work or stress for educators if sudden shifts do occur.

3 QUESTIONS...

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While there are many things to consider when discussing instruction, these **3 foundational questions** will ensure that your educators are ready for whatever may come and that their students will be able continue learning regardless of the circumstances or environment they are learning from.

1. **Do Students have Universal Access to content resources and curriculum?**

2. **Can students learn and progress asynchronously / at their own pace?**

3. **Is feedback / grading focused on mastery and growth?**

ACCESS?

1

In order to be fully prepared, we have been consulting and guiding our partner schools and districts to plan for the **MOST RESTRICTIVE** environment. If instruction is planned to be successful in remote learning, moving to hybrid or live instruction becomes much easier. This ALL starts with **ACCESS**.

FIRST STEPS:

We need to ensure that ALL students can access the curriculum, content and resources they need, whether they are in school or learning remotely. This can be done utilizing technology, a Learning Management System (like google classroom or Schoology), or even sending work home if needed to ensure access is equitable. Posting or sharing is just the start though. Educators can (and absolutely should) record lessons, utilize hyperlinks, and make the resources provided useful from **ANYWHERE**. Learning should not require a location.

ADVANCED IMPLEMENTATION

Once basic access is available for students, we have to also ensure that access to **differentiation**, **engaging learning strategies,** and innovative instruction is still present. Many teachers we have worked with provide this using strategies like **The Grid Method** to create **cohesive learning pathways** student can access and work through from anywhere.

WHAT **NOT** TO DO:

Do not create **inequitable access points** for learners. Ensure that what is being accessed is of the **same quality regardless of environment** (ex: a single cohesive plan vs. separate experiences).

PACING?

2

Once ACCESS is available, we must be flexible with WHEN students access information. **Students should be able to work ahead or behind within a unit of study.** This takes some planning, but can allow students to be met where they are at in their learning and in a way that can fit their schedule if the environment is remote or hybrid.

FIRST STEPS:

Allowing students to work asynchronously or at their own pace can solve a lot of issues remote learning can present. Students can work when they are able to, and if they miss a lesson, they can do it at a later time. This can easily be done by **creating cohesive and aligned learning paths** that cover several days or even entire units. These should be aligned to standards with clearly defined learning targets. **A template like this one can be used.** Recording lessons for future viewing or advanced screening can also be very useful.

ADVANCED IMPLEMENTATION

Creating dynamic, cohesive and aligned unit plans or utilizing **Mastery Grids** can be a great way to implement this idea further. This takes an entire unit and provides access and self-paced learning to all of the students in a classroom, remote or in person. **Progress monitoring** is also an important component of self paced learning. **You can use a page like this one** to help keep track of student progress.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

Using lessons or **activities that are required** to happen at a single time or location can create issues and cause a lot of problems.

GRADING & FEEDBACK?

3

Feedback becomes even more important in a remote learning environment. It allows the teachers to **provide corrective coaching and support** for learners as they wrestle with new content. It is absolutely paramount however that this feedback does not "punish" but supports learning. This can be done through standards-based and mastery-based grading practices.

FIRST STEPS:

Provide positive feedback to students and grade them based on mastery **NOT** compliance. Having educators put targets or objectives into their grade books, instead of assignments, can be a way to begin this shift. Focusing on knowledge gained, or mastery of content, is also an important shift as opposed to completion of work, effort given, or "neatness." **RETAKES should also be allowed.**

ADVANCED IMPLEMENTATION

Creating an aligned point scale that is attached to descriptors that articulate mastery is how most successful standards-based grading policies are implemented. The development of strong **aligned and tiered assessments** can also allow more targeted data to drive instruction.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

Grading based on non-mastery components of student work can **cause grades to be inflated or deflated**. Also grading of formative assessments, as well as grading assignments while learning is still occurring, can be detrimental.

OTHER QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

While these 3 questions are absolutely important to ensuring the best learning experience possible for all learners in your school or district there are others that should also be addressed or at least thought of outside of instructional planning.

HOW WILL SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING NEEDS BE ADDRESSED?

HOW WILL WE BUILD A POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE?

HOW WILL COMMUNICATION BE STRATEGICALLY PLANNED TO KEEP STAKEHOLDERS INFORMED?

WHAT TOOLS OR IDEAS HAVE WE LEARNED THAT SHOULD CONTINUE?

WHAT IDEAS OR INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES SHOULD BE CHANGED?

WHAT TRAINING OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT OUR STAFF?

CONTACT:

Chad Ostrowski is the CEO and Co-founder of the **Teach Better Team**. Through innovative practices, professional development, and consultation Chad and the Teach Better Team have worked with schools and districts across the country to help them reach more students.

You can contact Chad and The Teach Better Team using the information listed below. They are available for training, consulting, and staff PD both in-person or in a virtual setting. They also support strategic district planning and initiative rollout.

Chad Ostrowski, M.S. Ed.
chad@teachbetterteam
330.933.6200

@teachbetterteam / @chadostrowski

www.teachbetter.com

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