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COVID Notes from the Field: Transitioning to Digital Learning

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COVID Notes from the Field: Transitioning to Digital Learning

Abstract

This teacher reflection includes tips on family communication during a crisis. The reflection includes notes from the field on the transition to digital learning due to COVID and how to increase family communication when students are not able to be physically present in school.

Keywords

COVID 19, digital learning, family communication

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Communication with Students, Parents, and the Community during COVID-19

The bell at the end of 7th period Accelerated Geometry rang on March 12, 2020. My high school students gathered their books, copied down the homework problems and left my classroom. I would have never thought that March 12, 2020 would be the last day that I would physically meet with my students, make math puns, collaborate on math activities or meet with the clubs that I sponsor for this school year. In the time of uncertainty during COVID-19 and a transition to digital learning, the need for home and school partnership is necessary more than ever for student success. Allen (2007) discusses the importance for creating successful family-school partnerships and the need for “parents to understand what is occurring in the curriculum and ways in which they can monitor, assist or extend” their child’s learning (p. 152). Partnerships built on trust and respect look towards building upon community strengths and reaching out to understand cultural differences. Digital Learning has shifted my high school Geometry classes from the physical classroom to Google Classroom and virtual meetings through Microsoft Teams.

Two-way Communication Strategy Designed for Classroom/School Context

Prior to digital learning, our communication method to parents regarding class announcements, school events and student progress was through the messenger feature of Infinite Campus, the school’s Learning Management System. Communication through this messenger feature was consistent for all teachers at the school, and parents were familiar with how to use this technology. At the start of the digital learning transition, I wanted to enhance this communication feature to create family-school partnerships specifically focusing on how to make the communication more two-way. My high school is a suburban Metro-Atlanta community where all students are given a Microsoft Surface to use throughout the school year. We have a strong sense of family. Parents were receptive in the past of Infinite Campus messages and overall want to be involved in student success, so I decided to keep a technology method that was familiar to parents at our school. Instead of just sending announcements about digital learning and upcoming assignments, I wanted to provide a way for parents and students to provide input into what supports would be best for digital learning. Additionally, I wanted to foster dialogue between myself and the parents for concerns, suggestions and celebrations during this uncertain time. Since parents were already familiar with receiving messages through Infinite Campus, I decided to incorporate Microsoft Forms into these messages to create more two-way communication.

I first used this integration of the Microsoft Form into the Infinite Campus messages through a Link. The first Microsoft Form included questions that were multiple choice about technology preference, student supports, working hours and free response boxes for feedback. I continued to send these Microsoft Forms embedded into the Infinite Campus Messenger emails at the start of each week of digital learning. Overall, my Geometry Support classes have a total of 28 students, and I was able to successfully send these messages with embedded forms to 49 student messenger contacts. There are more parent contacts than the number of students due to fact that some students had more than one parent use the method. The first time I received 16 responses to the Microsoft Form. I also started posting the Link to the form in Google Classroom, which the parents were included in as well. The second form produced 21 responses and the third form had 19 responses. Although not every parent completed the Microsoft form, I took the responses into consideration when planning digital lessons, structuring times for live help sessions, and providing resources to help parents which I feel was effective to help student success.

Sustained Implementation of Two-Way Communication Connected to Student Learning

I communicated with parents weekly on the Friday before the start of each digital learning week. The message in Infinite Campus provided an update on the assignments for the week, supports, and two-way communication through the Microsoft Form. I also included behavior tips and suggestions for time and stress management during digital learning and quarantine. In order to encourage all families to participate regardless of language barriers, I enabled both the Spanish and Korean languages on the Microsoft Form. Parents could translate the form and respond in their native language and I would see their responses in English. I also had the bilingual liaison translate the Infinite Campus messages into Spanish and Korean for three of my ESOL students. The first message to families was on Friday 3/13 which included information on how Digital Learning would be conducted through Google Classroom. The Microsoft Form for that week included questions regarding technology access, resource preferences, and the best times for live interactive help sessions. In the first Microsoft Form, I received feedback from 16/28 students or 57% of the parents. The parents shared that their students had access to technology through their school-issued Microsoft surface and their child's phone. Additionally, parents indicated in a survey question that they would like to be provided with notes, keys, and videos. Also, the best time to hold virtual help sessions was in the afternoon / early evening since some parents would be working during the day. Taking this information, I was able to provide notes and keys in Google Classroom for parents, and I used Screen-Cast-O-Matic to make

instructional videos. I tried to keep the language in the videos family friendly for parents, defining all terms and making the examples more real world to help draw connections.

For the second Microsoft Form sent Friday 3/20, I communicated through Infinite Campus and Google Classroom since parents had been invited to join that platform as well. This time I received more feedback from 21/28 or 75% of the parents of students in the class. It looked like posting on Google Classroom in addition to the Infinite Campus Messenger allowed for a larger audience. Parents shared that live help sessions were great ways for their students to ask questions and hear me explain problems in real time. I also had a question that specifically focused on hosting a live TEAMS meeting for parents' questions and time management tips. Five parents responded that they would attend the office hours which I hosted in the evening. Overall, I had two parents attend and ask questions about how digital learning would look for the rest of the year and how I could best support their child.

Use of Family-Friendly Language

In both my Infinite Campus messages and two-way communication through Microsoft Forms, I strived to make sure that I was using welcoming language that would be understood by both students and parents. "Building relationships with families means respecting them- their language, values, struggles, insights, culture and family structure" (Allen, 2007, p.94). Since Geometry has many different vocabulary terms and theorems, I made sure that in the materials I presented I toned down the language, and if I included a content specific term I explicitly defined it. For example, I shared about how students were working on writing equations of circles and graphing circles with parents. However, the language of the standard describes deriving the equation of a circle given a center and endpoint and graphing on the cartesian plane. This simplified language helped parents get a picture and visual of the standard without using math terms that many parents wouldn't understand.

Additionally, I strived to avoid using acronyms or educational terms with families. An example would be that I shared with my parents the ability to have live help sessions through Microsoft TEAMS which I explained was like Skype or Zoom. At school, we call these synchronous sessions TEAMS, but that terminology didn't provide background information for parents. In order to reach all parents, I also took into consideration that the home language of families might not be English. I reached out to the bilingual liaison who was able to translate Infinite Campus Messages for three students whose parents spoke Spanish or

Korean. Also, I added a button to the Microsoft Form where parents would be able to click it to have both the newsletter and response questions read aloud. All these techniques and modifications helped me to reach the majority of my students' parents while being linguistically and culturally responsive.

Learning Supports Designed for Digital Learning

To meet the needs of all learners in the digital learning environment, I provide multiple supports for all assignments on Google Classroom which I shared with my families. Supports that have been most helpful to both parents and students have been recordings of myself teaching the material, copies of filled in notes, links to engaging website and the virtual help sessions. I have chosen to post these learning supports on Google Classroom since students and parents were familiar with using this method prior to the transition to digital learning.

In my weekly feedback forms to parents, I have been receiving feedback saying that students have enjoyed the teacher-made videos the most. I have tried to include fun elements to these videos such as including classic math puns and appearances from my dog Milo! Parents have commented that students enjoy hearing the explanations from their teacher and that they can listen along as well. I would have never thought that I would become a YouTuber, but my videos have been earning about 100 views each week which shows that they are being used by my students. Additionally, the videos have been a great resource to parents who have been transitioning to a teacher role at home. I aim to start at the ground level in the videos providing visuals and clear definitions of math terms.

Family/Community Engagement in Digital Lessons

Digital learning has provided a unique opportunity to be able to directly engage parents to learn along with their students. In my Geometry support course, I have aimed to use more activities to reach overarching concepts. One of the weekly digital lessons that both students and parents enjoyed was a probability activity related to the game show Wheel of Fortune. I began by posting a Microsoft Form for students and a family member to complete with a video clip about the Wheel of Fortune and for them to first guess which letters they think are the most popular in the alphabet. Then I had a short activity that was family friendly. Students would find a short paragraph and tally the letters in the 5 sentences in a chart on Google Classroom. Students then computed the probabilities to determine which letter was the most popular and compared this to the game show. At the end, students explained the activity and which letters would be the best to guess with their families. In the feedback form from parents, I received positive responses

about this activity. Students overall enjoyed the application of probability to a game show context and shared how they worked with a sibling to determine the letter tallies.

Overall, communication with families has been more important than ever during the time of COVID-19. Striving to help families support their students has been successful through videos and live help sessions. I feel that through digital learning, I have made the most contact with these parents than any other class that I have thought before. I hope that these communications through digital learning aim to help facilitate student learning and grow our school family because we are all in this together!

References

Allen, J. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Appendix A : Communication Strategy Materials

Below are samples of various two-way communication methods that I established during Digital Learning due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Each week, I emailed parents a message through Infinite Campus. This is Fulton County Schools learning management system and it allows me to reach all student guardian contacts. To allow for feedback and more two-way communication, I have included Microsoft Forms in all of the emails. Additionally, I have invited parents to join their child's Google Classroom and facilitate communication through that platform as well.

Infinite Campus Message for Week 1 Digital Learning Sent Friday 3/13

Class Message: Step 1

Add Email Attachment

Message Body

Good Morning Students and Parents of Geometry Support!

Next week we are going to start on Monday with our digital learning. We are going to be using Google Classroom for the assignments, but I wanted to get more information from both students and parents that will best support digital learning during this time period.

Please submit all feedback in this form to help shape our online learning experiences!

Link For Feedback Form : [Form LINK](#)

To join Google Classroom, go to classroom.google.com Log in using the [redacted] email account, then click on "join class" and use the code [redacted]

Please also reach out if you have any other questions or concerns. Wash your hands and stay safe :)

Save Save As Delete Test Next Close

Recipients

All recipients from section(s) Specific recipients from section(s)

Section(s)

Select All [Expand All](#)

Term S1

Term S2

- 1) 27.0998000-2 GSE Geometry Support
- 2) 35.0610000-5 Study Skills I
- 3) 35.0610000-1 Study Skills I
- 4) 27.0998000-1 GSE Geometry Support
- 6) 27.0995040-6 GSE AccGeoB/Algtl H
- 7) 27.0995040-3 GSE AccGeoB/Algtl H
- 12) 00.0010830 [redacted]
- 12) 00.0059000 [redacted]

Recipients

Student Messenger Contacts Students

Inbox/Email Delivery Time: 01:32 PM

Recipient Count: 56

No Devices: 7

Process Inbox: 19

Email: 49

I have 28 students in these Geometry Support classes; however, each student may have more than one parent email listed. Above you can see that this email was sent to 49 student messenger contacts.

Summary of Parent Responses to Microsoft Form for Week 1 Digital Learning Sent Friday 3/13

Welcome to Geometry Support Digital Learning - Week 1

Good Morning Students and Parents of Geometry Support!

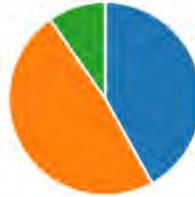
Next week we are going to start on Monday with our digital learning. We are going to be using Google Classroom for the assignments, but I wanted to get more information from both students and parents that will best support digital learning during this time period.

Please submit all feedback in this form to help shape our online learning experiences!

1. How will you best access the Digital Learning Assignments? (Select all that apply)

[More Details](#)

<input type="checkbox"/> School-Issued MS Tablet	13
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone	15
<input type="checkbox"/> Laptop at Home	3
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	0



2. What resources will best help you or your child practice the math content?

[More Details](#)

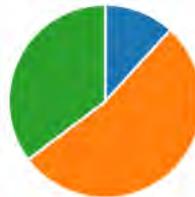
<input type="checkbox"/> Notes with Completed Keys	12
<input type="checkbox"/> Videos made by the teacher	12
<input type="checkbox"/> Website with interactive soluti...	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Live Help Sessions	10
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	3



3. What would be the best times to host live interactive help sessions through Zoom or MS Teams?

[More Details](#)

<input type="checkbox"/> Morning (9 AM - 11 AM)	2
<input type="checkbox"/> Afternoon (12 PM - 2 PM)	9
<input type="checkbox"/> Early Evening (3 PM - 5 PM)	6



4. Please share any concerns about digital learning or how I can best support your family?

[More Details](#)

16
Responses

Latest Responses

"I am still working, so later in the evening would help me be able to check to ...

"Geometry has been a struggle as year, so I am concerned about the digital le...

"I'm trying to figure out how I am going to keep track and stay on top of my k...

Infinite Campus Message for Week 2 Digital Learning Sent Friday 3/20

[Class Message: Step 1](#)

The screenshot shows a message editor interface. At the top, it says 'Message Details' with a 'Message Subject' field containing 'Geometry Support Digital Learning Week 2' and an 'Add Email Attachment' button. Below is the 'Message Body' editor with a rich text toolbar. The message content is as follows:

Welcome to Week 2 of Digital Learning for Geometry Support

This week we are going to be finishing up our unit on Equations of Circles and Lines. Students will be completing a test online through Google Classroom.

If you are looking for ways to help your child study and prepare, I have posted videos that I created on the content classwork tab in Google Classroom for Digital Learning Week 2.

Also, according to the feedback from last week, the best time for help sessions was in the afternoon / early evening.

I will be hosting live interactive help sessions in TEAMS on Tuesday 3/24 at 2 pm and Thursday 3/26 at 3 pm the link is in Google Classroom.

At the bottom of the editor are buttons for 'Save', 'Save As', 'Delete', 'Test', 'Next', and 'Close'.

Also I posted the Microsoft Feedback Form for Digital Learning Week 2 in Google Classroom

Stream Classwork People Grades



Alyssa Noland
Mar 18 (Edited 2:06 PM)

Welcome to Week 2 of Digital Learning for Geometry Support

This week we are going to be finishing up our unit on Equations of Circles and Lines. Students will be completing a test online through Google Classroom.

If you are looking for ways to help your child study and prepare, I have posted videos that I created on the content classwork tab in Google Classroom for Digital Learning Week 2.

Also, according to the feedback from last week, the best time for help sessions was in the afternoon / early evening.

I will be hosting live interactive help sessions in TEAMS on Tuesday 3/24 at 2 pm and Thursday 3/26 at 3 pm the link is in Google Classroom.

Please encourage your child to join and feel free to also listen in on the session!

Below is the Feedback Form!



Geometry Support Digita...
<https://forms.office.com/Pag...>

Summary of Parent Responses to Microsoft Form for Week 2 Digital Learning Sent Friday 3/20

Geometry Support Digital Learning Week 2

Welcome to Week 2 of Digital Learning for Geometry Support

This week we are going to be finishing up our unit on Equations of Circles and Lines. Students will be completing a test online through Google Classroom.

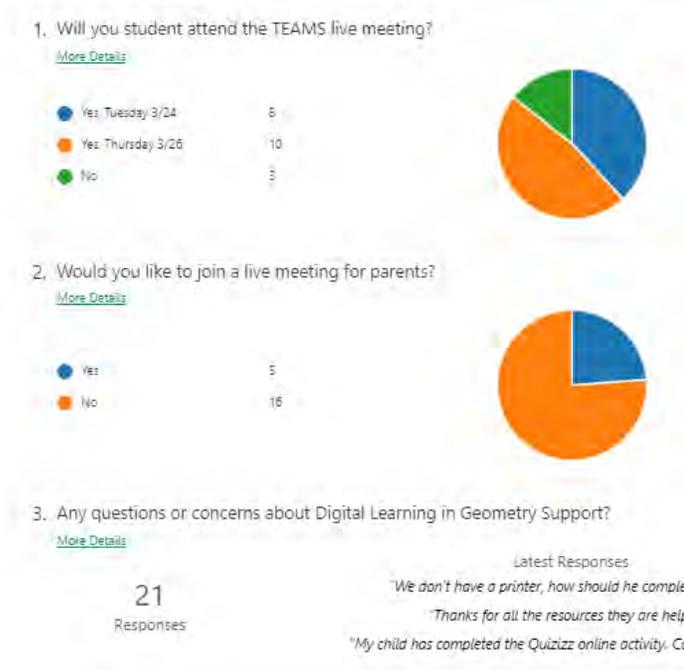
If you are looking for ways to help your child study and prepare, I have posted videos that I created on the content classwork tab in Google Classroom for Digital Learning Week 2.

Also, according to the feedback from last week, the best time for help sessions was in the afternoon / early evening.

I will be hosting live interactive help sessions in TEAMS on Tuesday 3/24 at 2 pm and Thursday 3/26 at 3 pm the link is in Google Classroom.

Please encourage your child to join and feel free to also listen in on the session!

Have a great week!



I noticed on this second survey I got more responses. It looks like posting on Google Classroom in addition to the Infinite Campus Messenger allowed for greater audience. I also created a parents question office hours in response to the 5 Yes answers for survey question 2.

Infinite Campus Message for Week 3 Digital Learning Sent Friday 3/27

Class Message: Step 1

Message Details
Message Subject
Geometry Support Digital Learning Week 3

Add Email Attachment

Message Body

Welcome to Week 3 of Digital Learning for Geometry Support

This week we are going to start up our unit on probability. This is usually everyone's favorite unit since practicing probability is shown through many games that we play such as rolling a dice or cards.

I have create a video introducing this topic of probability:
You can even see a guest experience from my furry friend MILO!

I will be hosting live interactive help session in TEAMS on Tuesday 3/24 at 2 pm and Thursday 4/2 at 3 pm the link is in Google Classroom.

We have an interactive probability activity coming up to complete with your family at home! Feedback is always welcome!

Save Save As Delete Test Next Close

Also I posted the Microsoft Feedback Form for Digital Learning Week 3 in Google Classroom

Stream Classwork People Grades

Alyssa Noland
Mar 25 (Edited 2:40 PM)

Welcome to Week 3 of Digital Learning for Geometry Support

This week we are going to start up our unit on probability. This is usually everyone's favorite unit since practicing probability is shown through many games that we play such as rolling a dice or cards.

I have create a video introducing this topic of probability:
You can even see a guest experience from my furry friend MILO!

I will be hosting live interactive help session in TEAMS on Tuesday 3/24 at 2 pm and Thursday 4/2 at 3 pm the link is in Google Classroom.

We have an interactive probability activity coming up to complete with your family at home! Please stay tuned for updates in Google Classroom.

Geometry Support Digita...
<https://forms.office.com/Pag...>

Summary of Parent Responses to Microsoft Form for Week 3 Digital Learning Sent Friday 3/27

Geometry Support Digital Learning Week 3

Welcome to Week 3 of Digital Learning for Geometry Support

This week we are going to start up our unit on probability. This is usually everyone's favorite unit since practicing probability is shown through many games that we play such as rolling a dice or cards.

I have create a video introducing this topic of probability:
You can even see a guest experience from my furry friend MILO!

I will be hosting live interactive help session in TEAMS on Tuesday 3/24 at 2 pm and Thursday 4/2 at 3 pm the link is in Google Classroom.

We have an interactive probability activity coming up to complete with your family at home! Please stay tuned for updates in Google Classroom.

1. What resource has been the best for digital learning in Geometry?

[More Details](#)

 Notes Keys	12
 Interactive Worksheets	5
 Teacher Videos	5
 Live Help Sessions in TEAMS	9



2. Was probability a topic that you enjoyed learning? What games do you play at home?

[More Details](#)

19

Responses

Latest Responses

- "I have been teaching my kids card games because we have had more..."*
- "I really was good at probability it is a topic that has applications whi..."*
- "I don't remember much about probability, but we do play card game..."*

3. Questions or Feedback on Digital Learning so far ...

[More Details](#)

19

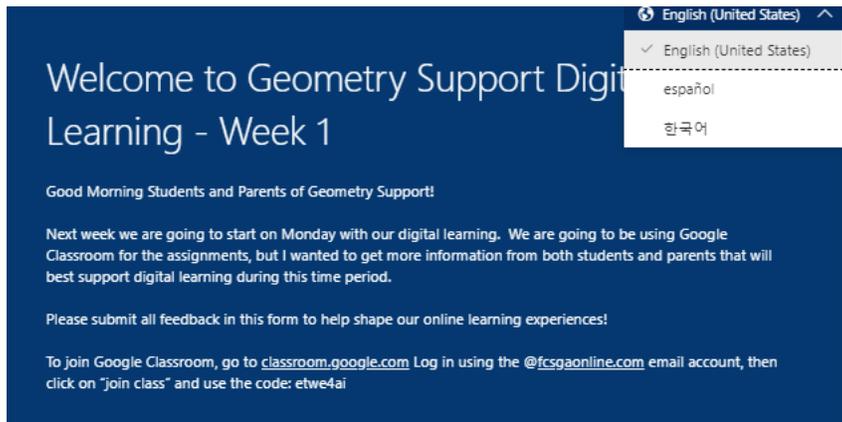
Responses

Latest Responses

- "can assignments for geometry count towards geo support for a grade"*
- "what is grading going to look like for the rest of the semester"*
- "Thanks for all your resources and information. It is helping"*

Meeting the Needs of All Parents

In the Microsoft Forms, I was able to edit the language options to include both Spanish and Korean for parents who speak those languages. All the responses back to me were translated to English.



Additionally, I had a feature enabled in the forms that there was a microphone button next to each section that allowed you to listen to the text.

