



SEVERAL LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE COVID PANDEMIC

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To put it mildly, the COVID pandemic has been a game changer, a shake-up, a reset, and a force that has made us re-examine who we are, what we can do and a reminder of what we can overcome if we work together in education. Essentially, it has been one of the greatest teachers that has provided some of the most valuable lessons about life. It doesn't matter where you teach, what grade level you teach or how long you have been teaching, the impact of the COVID pandemic has been felt in a multitude of ways. Although the goals of teaching and meeting the needs of students remain the same, the rules have changed, the challenge has upped its ante, and educators across the U.S. have discovered more about themselves than any other time before over the past year. The impact of COVID has come with some valuable lessons that could only be taught through our current climate in education. Like other trials and tribulations in life, COVID has served as a teacher, but it is our responsibility to embrace and learn the lessons as we expect our students to.

Lesson #1: The strong do not always survive, but the most adaptable do!

During COVID, having strength as an educator is an asset to navigate unfamiliar times and circumstances. But even the strongest educators still struggle to maintain a high level of teaching and a sense of purpose to effectively educate students. That is because it isn't simply about how strong you are in your instructional delivery, classroom management or your knowledge of the curriculum. Even if we were great at these things, due to the challenges of COVID we must rethink how we serve students and families. The challenges to successfully educate students, maintain healthy relationships, motivating students for engagement and adhering to a host of other requirements requires such as "contact tracing" has required adaptability. Adaptability is defined as, *"the quality of being able to adjust to new conditions"*. That is simply what schools, teachers, leaders, students, and parents had to do if they wanted to be successful. You cannot typically fix new problems with old solutions because new problems usually require new ways of thinking and adapting to circumstances in new and unfamiliar ways. Essentially, we are dealing with challenges that years prior we never knew we would have. You must be willing and able to think differently if you want

to experience success. In the end, when this is over and schools have been allowed to return to some sense of normalcy those teachers and leaders that remain standing strong will be those that had the ability to adapt to their circumstances whether familiar or unfamiliar.

Lesson #2: You are better than you think you are.

I am usually an optimistic thinker who sees the good over the bad in most situations. However, during the summer before the 2020-2021 school year I wasn't as optimistic about school starting. With all the new guidelines and rules that we needed to follow, the requirement of wearing masks and practicing social distancing, I thought it would surely be a disaster! I envisioned me and my staff running around all day trying to get students to put their masks on, students would refuse to wear masks and we would be handing out hundreds of masks daily. Maybe it was only my thinking and for my school (I suspect not), but I was wrong. The students and staff in my school are doing an amazing job, better than I had imagined. Wearing masks is not a major issue and to be honest, only a handful of issues have occurred.

Many educators were like me, and questioned if the operations of schools would work, whether students would possess the ability to be engaged and would the essentials of learning take place through in-person learning, blended learning, or remote learning. The answer has been "yes" not only in my school but also in schools across the country. I know it has been far from perfect or ideal and there is not substitution for students engaging in face-to-face learning provided by a teacher, but I truly believe that educators are doing their best in spite of the circumstances. No one that I know has ever taught students during a global pandemic or led a school in one prior to COVID. So, current educators continue to come up with solutions without being able to draw from historical references. The research and data is still being collected, the rules and guidelines are still being created, and changes almost seem to come daily. However, from what I am witnessing we are doing better than we think. In fact, in education we are often doing better than we think we are when we consider our "locust of control". The problem is, we don't give ourselves a chance to grow because we think ourselves out of opportunities to become better from our challenges. Once you confront a challenge you should always envision a winning outcome and always remember it not about how strong you are but it is more about your ability to adapt!

Lesson #3: Creativity solves more complex problems than intelligence.

I am not one to tell you that intelligence is not important because honestly, I would choose intelligence over the opposite of intelligence anytime. However, intelligence and creativity serve different purposes. The intelligence of doctors, scientists and others have helped us understand COVID, the impact on the human body, how it is spread, the nuances of the virus itself and most importantly how we are able to protect ourselves. Intelligence and research has served as a high degree of importance in these matters so we can be educated and learn how to protect ourselves and reducing the spread of

COVID. However, once we begin to understand the virus, how it impacts our body then we can use our greatest asset, which is our creativity to think of solutions and appropriate responses. This is what we have been doing in schools and in classrooms since COVID has arrived. It is imperative that you can use creativity as a strategy in educating and providing services to students. Based on the information we receive, we will be better equipped as to what additional interventions are needed, which appropriate safeguards need to be incorporated and how we can efficiently meet the diverse needs of students. It will also take creativity to support students, teachers, and schools. Consider your school's schedule, the use of technology, people working together, resources that have been created and new platforms of communicating with parents. You can even consider the creative designs of masks that people wear as a small example of the extent of our creativity since COVID. We as educators have become more creative whether we like it or not. We have used creative energy to solve challenges that are new and unlike we have experienced before. Therefore, it is imperative as educators that we never underestimate the power of our abilities and use our creativity to solve challenges as we face them in schools.

We are in a new dimension of educational services. However, although many things have changed, there are still many things that have remained the same. We are being impacted by a new variant of COVID, but students still need the support and engagement of caring educators and that will never change or go away. I encourage you to use your creativity, adapt new ways of thinking and maintain a positive outlook and know you are capable. In education, we must reformulate old ways of doing business and devise new strategies to meet the needs and serve students in creative and meaningful ways. There has been a lot that has been lost but above all we must never lose our humanity and keep the people at the forefront of our decisions, actions, and intentions.