

Student Check-ins

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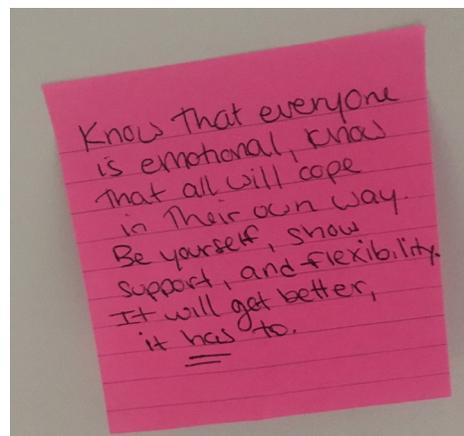
One of the aspects of the classroom that Shari realized early on that she and her students were missing out on were the personal connections that are built over the course of months of small conversations before, during, and after class. We think of school as a place to go to learn, but, as teachers know, it is so much more than that. Shari wanted a way to not only disrupt the distance students were feeling, but also the distance their families were feeling from school as well.

"When remote instruction began in March, it was difficult for the kids to not be able to express themselves as they typically do throughout the school day. Maybe they can express themselves to their friends through their phones, but in the virtual classroom, it's kind of hard."

► How did Shari address the need for students to feel engaged not just as a learner but as a whole person?

Shari used a mix of strategies. She held office hours on Google Meet, where students could pop in to talk about how they were doing, and she had the most success calling students' homes to check in. An important part of this was to not only strengthen the bonds the student had with the classroom, but the bonds she formed over the year with parents as well.

"Of course they were struggling. Of course there were issues with the internet. But I showed them that I would be available. A lot of times I had to be on my phone at 6 p.m., 7 p.m., 8 p.m., any chance that I had to be able to help them, even though they would have comments or questions, if I couldn't help them at that moment I would make sure to get back to them in a reasonable time."



A note that Shari kept next to her computer to remind herself that everyone's needs are different.

► To start reaching out to students' homes try following these two pieces of advice:

1. There are many reasons that students may not be engaging in our classrooms. Shari recommends that conversations with students come from a place of empathy.
2. Shari found that it was essential to build relationships with her students' families. Her plan is "to definitely become informed [about student needs] and reach out as much as I can without being a burden to them."

"I felt that keeping connected to my students and their families was how I maintained my role as the teacher in the virtual classroom. It would be so easy to post a video or a worksheet and then just grade and return it, but that was not me. That was not okay with me."