



NC Beginning Teacher Newsletter

Regional Education Facilitators – North Carolina Department of Public Instruction – bit.ly/NC DPIREF



A Message from the 2019 Western Regional Teacher of the Year, Caesar Compana, IV

Saying it's a head-spinning time for educators, especially for beginning ones, is an understatement. Our profession has always been fraught with challenges, but facing a global shutdown due to a pandemic has never been one of them. In fact, a century ago, in the age of influenza, public schooling for American children through their teen years wasn't remotely the norm for even half the population, let alone the ubiquitous monolith we now know. If we could teleport Joseph Dewey to right now, I think he'd be equal parts heart-warmed and heartbroken at the sight of school buses delivering daily meals to children in need.

But these are the times in which we exist, and we don't get to choose them any more than Dewey did. What we do get to choose is how we respond to the times, and, even more than that, how we shape them. In the words of Walt Whitman: "That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse." Robin Williams' immortal Mr. Keating (*Dead Poets Society*) poignantly follows that quote with one heck of an essential question: "What will your verse be?"

I believe your verse will be a force for good, and as unprecedented as the times we face.

Consider the unique dynamic. On March 16th, in so many ways, you landed on equal footing with veteran teachers. More than that, as we all brave these uncharted waters, you're likely much more comfortable using the navigational equipment; you're perched on the mast while we seasoned mariners look to your vantage and guidance. ***Case in point: I've never even taken an online course, let alone taught one, so I'm turning to BTs like you to show me the ropes.*** Meanwhile, all those two-decades-in-the-honing skills that you may have envied a month ago -- the arc of a lesson that mic drops right at the bell, the sneakily smooth thematic transitions, the Tony-worthy stage demeanor, and the deep, deep hat of classroom management tricks -- all just took a backseat to skills and nuance that are more likely in your dashboard. You were born to Zoom, Screencastify and TikTok your way to great instruction, so please light the way.

Moreover, a great majority of your frustrations are put on hold for the time being, like the baptism-by-fire of trying to operate within your school's procedural and cultural norms (Here's looking at you, tornado drill

in the middle of a Kahoot question), or that perpetually eerie sense that class mutiny could break out at any moment -- all gone for the time being.

And what's replaced these dynamics has been inspiring so far: The great mobilizing and rapid transition to distance learning facilitation, the quick devising and execution of plans to ensure that all our students, especially the less fortunate, can still have the opportunity to get schooled in the era of Coronavirus.

My own attempt at a contribution to you, and to the world of education at large, is a reminder to reflect. To metacognate. To systems-think. To deeply ponder. As much as these times call for micro-detailed, fast-brain urgency, they also open the door for macroscopic, default-network, existential reflection about what we do and how we do it.

Of course, the centerpiece of a teacher's existential questioning is this: ***what does great learning look like, and how am I inciting it?*** May your soul-searching adventure include virtual stops at the shrines of Ken Robinson, James Paul Gee, Ted Dintersmith, Rita Pierson, Jo Boaler, Parker Palmer, and any other welcomed detours provided by audiobook recommendations or your trusty YouTube sidebar.

If your journey resembles my own, you'll land on the idea that the best learning is the effect of great coaching. I'm betting PE teachers and sports coaches will be some of the most innovative practitioners during our homebound time, since they naturally create opportunities within a gamified, "sandbox" framework. They set clear boundaries yet allow the powers of student/player agency to abound within. For instance, in football, a running back who has been prepped mechanically to follow the Xs and Os (like the student mechanically trained only to succeed on a multiple-choice test) will falter whenever there's a missed block or a wrinkle in the defensive scheme. Adversely, the back who relies solely on his creative impulses ends up losing yardage, or the ball, or both. But one operating ideally, having been nurtured within



The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey window has been extended until **April 7, 2020 at 11:59 pm**. If you haven't already done so, visit asqnc.com to complete the survey! #asqnc2020

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cont.

a “sandbox” framework -- that is, where the running back is coached to be technically/schematically sound while simultaneously celebrated for his uniquely creative juices -- has the chance to be great. Transfer the analogy to our best classrooms, whether in-person or virtual, and you'll find the same dynamic (just as Maria Montessori would have it). Moreover, transfer beyond the classroom, and you'll find workforce in-demand skills lists chock full of attributes that are the byproducts of the sandbox approach. Where student agency abounds, so does lifelong learning.

And it's reflexive. Just as students do their best learning in a sandbox, so do you in your own practice. **Let's use the situational opportunity to stir our own innovative juices.** “Getting your feet wet first”, “Learning to play the game”, and “Just borrow everything” are the common refrains typically dispensed to young educators for reasons of practicality and managerial ease, but they now seem antiquated, if not altogether obsolete. Let's take these atypical times and explore paths untraveled. Repeat the Mr. Keating quote to yourself, find your inner kid, carpe diem and create something

incredible. I can't wait to see social studies teachers promoting historical real-time strategy games to facilitate comprehensive societal studies, or math teachers using Desmos and live video streams to challenge students to graphically model nuances of the COVID-19 curve, or early grades teachers hosting competitions for student-captured bird- or insect-ID photos that become the foundation for a cross-curricular project.

Finally, and above all, **take empathy to a level it's never been before.** Think back to the bustle of a typical, pre-COVID-19 school day. How much of that day was driven by the quest to prove compliance, increase performance, align with standards or sustain growth? All of these have their place, but none has the capacity to actually move student learning, because you can't understand the learning without understanding the student. We must walk in their shoes to recognize how students receive and react to the tasks we put in front of them. We must empathize to realize to what degree and why they've entrusted us. We need to see how they view school in the context of their own lives and futures. With the current situation at hand, and so much of the backstage noise out of the way, let's put empathy for our students front and center, and keep it there.

This powerful play does indeed go on, and I look forward to the verse you'll contribute.

Remote Learning Support

[There's a lot to prepare for](#), and before anything else, [relationships to maintain, strengthen and nurture](#).

One important aspect to consider is how you can adapt a learning day schedule to provide structure and reduce anxiety during this period, for you and your students' families. **Consistent schedules help.** With so much in the air, it's incredibly helpful to lay out the times you'll be definitely doing certain things. While building remote learning, create a class schedule, including “live” online times, independent work time, and breaks. [Here's some tips on how to get started.](#)

Set learning hours help. The suggested number of hours for remote learning per day are as follows: 1-2 hour(s) for Elementary, 2-3 hours for Middle and 3-4 hours for High school students. Setting a routine with

a designated workspace and time for recreation/physical activity are important to embed into the schedule daily.

Use reliable resources and support. For example, [The North Carolina Virtual Public School is offering Learning Continuity Webinars](#). In addition to the Learning Continuity Webinars, NCVPS Talks Professional Development will feature a combination of focused Office Hours, along with Interactive Conversation Webinars. If possible, join in during the Office Hours. Office Hours are structured as Question and Answer time to assist educators as they transition to online learning. They are smaller groups to ensure that support is specific and targeted. Remember to continue sharing school specific questions for your mentor and/or beginning teacher coordinator as they will work to support your professional growth during this time as well.

COVID-19 DAILY SCHEDULE		
Before 6:00am	Wake up	Get dressed, make your bed, get yourself out of bed
6:00-7:00	Morning walk	Stretch, walk into the day, enjoy the outdoors
7:00-11:00	Academic time	NO ELECTRONICS Spotify, books, flash cards, study guide, journal
11:00-12:00	Creative time	Colors, magazines, drawing, cutting, any hands-on work
12:00	Lunch	
12:30PM	Chore time	Washing, vacuum, fold, clean up kitchen table and chairs Wash all your clothes, get your room, and take care of your car (wash, wax, oil, etc.)
1:00-2:00	Quiet time	Reading, journal, nap
2:00-4:00	Academic time	ELECTRONICS ON Self games, Pinterest, educational sites
4:00-5:00	Afternoon fresh air	Break, walk the dog, play outside
5:00-6:00	Dinner	
6:00-8:00	Free TV time	NO electronics
8:00	Bedtime	JK kids
8:30PM	Bedtime	At kids who follow the daily schedule & don't fight

Sample schedule from @CommLearningCenter post on Twitter