SECONDARY
CONNECTION

Middle School / High School Curriculum Newsletter

DISTANCE LEARNING

Online & in the Classroom

CONNECT

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TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

NEW BEGINNINGS

SIDE

(PART I OF III)

90

BY JANA COMER

TRANSFORMING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE THROUGH COLLABORATION

"Welcome to 2020!" they said. "Let's build a plane in mid-flight; It'll be great fun!" they said.

If we're on the same page, which I feel we totally are, we all know "they" have lost their everlovin' mind; however, there is a lot more truth to this statement than just the idea of utter chaos. Yes, frankly, the past few months have been nothing short of assembling a 747 in mid-flight, but it has also presented a remarkable opportunity for growth and essentially completing tasks that have never been done before in the sphere of education. Throughout this quandary, educators and administrators across the nation have stepped up to the plate and handled this daunting task with grace, patience, flexibility, and determination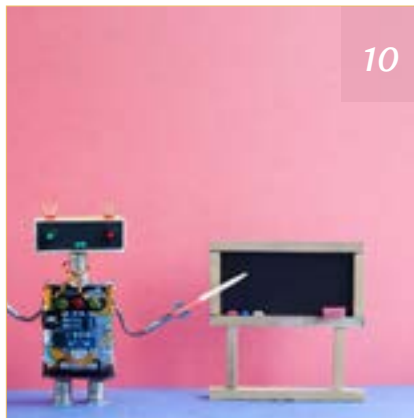 in order to do what is best for our students. With that being said, KUDOS for all the hard work, dedication, and perseverance displayed during this tumultuous time of constructing, dismantling, and re-assembling all the pieces of what was once coined "the normal," in order to work towards successfully unearthing what we are finding to be the new normal.

In 1998, alternative rock band Semisonic released the hit single "Closing Time" in which lead vocalist and songwriter Dan Wilson uses the metaphor of leaving an establishment at closing time to equate the anticipation of unexpected fatherhood. Driving home his point Wilson writes, "...every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end..." to symbolize the closing of one chapter of life and the beginning of another. Throughout the pandemic, this particular lyric has lingered in the back of my mind, especially in the professional aspect of life. What was once the "norm" quickly took a nosedive into the abyss, closing one chapter of normalcy, and presenting us with the surprising beginning

of what is the very unexpected, new normal. I won't lie; it's quite terrifying leaving behind what we've always known to explore the terrain of newfangled territory; however, this is where perspective kicks in. Despite how we may feel, WE CAN. End of Story. As educators we have proven that time and time again, and displaying a growth mindset is what will make the 20-21 school year one for the record books. This is our opportunity to transform the face of education and the student learning experience.

Early in life I vividly remember being told that a lesson is best learned through experience. Working in the field of education during the pandemic has truly been an experience that has provided an outpouring of lessons-some of which were extremely hard-learned. Similar to the construction of the 747 cruising through the sky at 570 miles per hour, there have been 12,329,423,948 plans, and plans for those plans, and more plans for the other plans. Most of which worked, some of which did not, all of which were reflected upon and revised based on lessons learned. It's a strenuous, ever-evolving process, and that's ok. Time-consuming, stressful, monotonous, overwhelming, nerve-racking, (insert your choice expletive here), etc. are all words that describe what we've been feeling; nonetheless, we've been able to begin revolutionizing education by pushing through, learning, reflecting, and adapting. Visionary leaders in education such as Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, John Hattie, and a myriad of others have had a huge impact on the adaptation and transition in a time such as this. Using the research and findings of these educational gurus, we are going to take a deeper look at ways to transform the student learning experience over the course of a three part series. For part one, let's take a minute to Stop.Collaborate and Listen.

Collaboration

Picture it...It's 1989 and we're cruisin' the streets of Miami with Vanilla Ice, rollin in his 5.0 down Beachfront Avenue with the rag-top down so our hair can blow. As we encounter several obstacles during our hang sesh, he reassures us "if there's a problem yo I'll solve it." All is well in the world. Fast-forward 31 years later, and we're still really needing that same energy, Rob Van Winkle. Where ya at, bruh? Despite his lack of being able to solve all the things the pandemic has presented, we can take a philosophical nugget of wisdom from the lyrical poet's one-hit-wonder "Ice Ice Baby."

Making a professional connection to a Vanilla Ice lyric may seem a bit extreme, but hey, it's 2020 are you that surprised? While research claims that the use of the term *collaborate* in the infamous line "stop, collaborate, and listen" actually serves no real purpose other than fitting the meter of the song, it does serve a purpose for us as educators, as well as our students. As professional adults, we realize the dire importance of collaborating to share ideas, learn from one another, and obtain fresh perspectives in order to refine areas of our own practices. Equally important, our students should be provided ample opportunities to engage in the same meaningful and productive dialogue. _John Hattie's_ research indicates that classroom discussion has an effect size of 0.82 in relation to student achievement. Fisher and Frey further reinforce Hattie's findings by conveying the idea that in order to make collaboration an advantageous learning experience, the opportunity should be presented once students have "acquired sufficient knowledge and begin to grapple with the relations between ideas." This arrangement allows students to take more ownership and regulate their own learning through query, justification, exploration, and curiosity. We all know that students love to share ideas and socialize; however, to keep the conversation from going rouge like the initial 2020 presidential debate, we must set parameters and model for them the behavior that we expect. The collaboration and discourse taking place should move students forward in their thinking while adding an element of productive struggle. For some really insightful ways to implement more effective collaborative practices in the classroom check out Fisher and Frey's Distance Learning Playbook, as well as _Engaging the Adolescent Learner_.

At the end of the day, our job as educators is about keeping the main thing the main thing--which is focusing on the well-being of our students. Even though this year has presented numerous challenges, it has also presented us with just as many opportunities to transform the educational experience into something we could have never imagined. Whether we are manufacturing an aircraft in mid-flight or finding the best way to educate our students, it's all about progress, not perfection--taking one step at a time.

> Learning to recognize and create new and better opportunities for our students is what matters. In fact, *it's essential.*
> - *George Couros*

Sources:

Distance Learning Playbook- Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, John Hattie

The Innovator's Mindset -George Couros

Hattie's Effect Sizes

VANILLA ICE, REMEMBER WHEN YOU SAID IF THERE WAS A PROBLEM YOU WOULD SOLVE IT? TIME TO STEP UP.

Becoming a Connected Educator:
What It Means and Why it Matters

by Lorie Yates

Educators live on professional islands. It's such a contradiction because we spend so much time surrounded by other human beings! Educators interact in some way with 100s of students and dozens of other adults every single day of the school week. And still, we often find ourselves feeling alone in our professional situations.

Yet, everything we know about the neurobiology and behavior of humans tells us that being connected to one another is vital to our survival (literally). Matthew Lieberman, Professor at UCLA and author of the book *Social* says, "We have a profound proclivity towards trying to understand the thoughts and feelings bouncing around inside the skulls of people we interact with…the fact that we can do this at all gives us an unparalleled ability to cooperate and collaborate with others – using their goals to help drive our own behavior."

As you continue reading, you'll see that being a connected educator is more than just being a part of a team or joining a professional organization. Being a connected educator is crucial to our "survival" as educators.

We have paddled our way through this vast sea we call teaching and learning on our own for way too long. The time is now for us to take responsibility for owning our professional learning by networking with individuals who share our passion and our desire to be the change!

What Connected Educators Do Differently

Connected educators connect.

Educators use face to face and online communities of practice to improve their effectiveness and enhance student learning. They establish these networks to share practices, access experts and solve problems. They actively reach out to learn, share and collaborate. They bring ideas back to their classrooms. They love learning and they don't limit that learning to just traditional delivery models. Connected educators know that every single educator, no matter how experienced, can still learn and should keep learning.

Connected educators unite.

Connected educators strive to support colleagues in their own buildings, district, and beyond. Connected educators are loyal to the organization they serve and desperately want it to become as successful as it can possibly become. Our Back to School keynote speaker, George Couros says, "I believe we can each make an impact - globally and locally - when we stop worrying about who is best and concern ourselves with helping everyone succeed. So don't hold back; share what you're learning and what's working for you." Connected educators don't look down on themselves or their colleagues or suggest that classrooms are "broken." They continuously seek opportunities to collaborate with other educators to make things better.

Connected educators trust.

In *Dare to Lead*, Brene Brown writes, "adaptability to change, hard conversations, feedback, problem solving, ethical decision making, recognition, resilience and all of the other skills that underpin daring leadership are born of vulnerability." Connected educators push themselves to take risks and extend their learning outside their comfort zone in order to make a broader and greater impact. It's not easy. It requires a great deal of trust to put yourself out in front of the entire

DO OR DO NOT, THERE IS NO TRY
— Yoda —

world - sharing a photo, a video, opinions, ideas, resources, or your classroom. Embracing vulnerability helps you dare to expect the best and be the best.

In *The Innovator's Mindset*, George Couros describes an O2 commercial with the tagline "Be More Dog." The commercial is all about how a risky decision can lead to extremely positive changes. We sometimes spend so much time telling ourselves what we can't do, that we lose sight of all the things we can do. To get inspired, and laugh a little, check out the "Be More Dog" video *here*.

Connected educators evolve.

Let's be honest, in our business, there is often a reluctance to embrace new "things." Sometimes, things change and we don't understand why. Remember Dr. Townsend's challenge to us to know our WHY? Connected educators focus on the "why" - that we are here to design authentic, engaging and relevant learning experiences that inspire learning and develop life skills in our students. Connected educators

others. They use resources and share resources for the sole purpose of improving teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Connected educators find a way.

I know, I know! The notion of doing any more than you already are probably gives you anxiety! This school year, more than ever, you probably feel like you can barely manage your daily responsibilities, much less take on anything "new." But, I'm going to take that to another level and

> ## The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.
> *William Pollard*

Dr. Marcia Tate @drmarciatate · Oct 6
Don't complicate the process! Whatever your goal is—professional or personal—it's time to get started. #edchat

1. Decide what you want.
2. Write it down.
3. Make a plan.
4. Work on it every day.

know that to do our jobs successfully, our pedagogy, tools, resources, and soft skills will continually evolve.

Connected educators give and receive.

In Matthew Lieberman's TedTalk The Social Brain and Its Superpowers, he describes how the brain's neurological network "comes on" when we are taking in new information with the intention of sharing it back. The more we consume information, the more this neurological network lights up, and switches us from being selfish informational consumers to being "information DJs where we're actually motivated to spread what we learn and share it with others". Connected educators engage in a never-ending cycle of consuming information and then giving back to
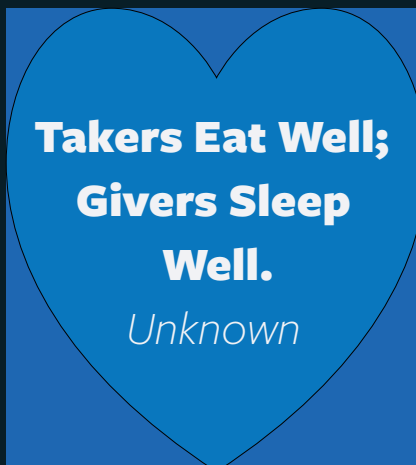
suggest - this year, more than ever, IS the time to get more connected with educators within our district and without. The fact that you are reading this newsletter is a testament to the power of connection and learning in the practice of education. And, the thing about connected educators is that once they are connected, the workload is lifted, supports are put in place, and the interaction becomes enjoyable. There is fun in learning new things and sharing ideas.

Connected educators find a way to use social media to their advantage. Couros asks "What if all teachers tweeted (using a hashtag) or posted about one thing a day that they did in their classrooms and took five minutes to read other teacher's tweets? Imagine the positive impact that single action would have on learning and school

Takers Eat Well; Givers Sleep Well.
Unknown

culture. Imagine what saying "I saw your tweet about what you did yesterday...can you tell me more about it?" would do for both the learning and the relationships.

In *What Connected Educators Do Differently*, the authors write, "Our experience with connected educators all over the world is that they fundamentally believe that together they can change the world - one tweet, one blog, one contribution at a time. Taking time to explore resources, craft ideas, share knowledge, and take action is what we observed connected educators doing as part of their mission to create life changing moments not just for themselves, but for their students, colleagues, and other educators."

By entering into the world of a connected educator, we can benefit from and contribute to the collective brainpower we have in one another as we serve in the noblest profession of all - the education of our young people.

In What Connected Educators Do Differently, each chapter closes with three tasks:

Follow 5 = Find 5 educators who stand as models in an area you want to grow. Follow them on social media, blogs, etc. and interact with them to enhance your life as a connected educator. Over time, "Follow" more as your own professional growth needs change.

Find 5 = Find 5 online resources/tools you can use to further develop yourself in a particular area. As you use these resources and tools, "give back" by sharing with others.
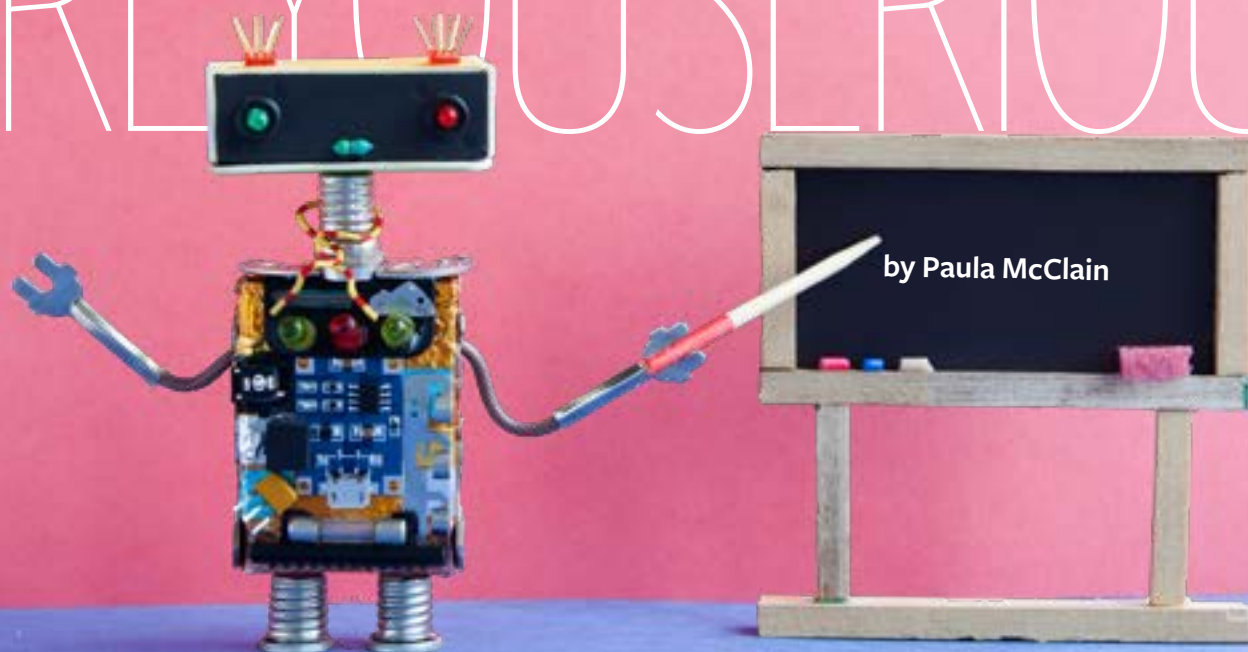
Take 5 = Five action steps you can take to get started or continue growing as a connected educator.

Below are some of my favorites. I hope they help you either get started, or continue on, in your journey to be a more connected educator.

FOLLOW 5	FIND 5	TAKE 5

Jennifer Gonzalez
Twitter Link
Facebook Page
Website

George Couros
Twitter Link
Website

Catlin Tucker
Twitter Link
Website

Douglas Fisher
Twitter Link
Fisher and Frey Website/Resources

Todd Whitaker
Twitter Link

ShakeUpLearning's list of recommended podcasts, and they have a podcast of their own.

Ditch That Textbook

40 Education Twitter Chats

Reimagining the Classroom Experience Canvas Course was built for back to school professional development. Revisit this course for amazing resources on a wide variety of topics for your professional learning.

SimpleK12 Free Webinars

Tweet or post something professional 2- 3 times a week. It could be a quote, a photo of something that happened in your classroom, or a resource/strategy that worked well for you.

Set 20 - 30 minutes 4 - 5 times a week to connect with like-minded educators either face to face or online. Use Twitter hashtags or Facebook groups to help you maximize your time connecting online.

Watch a webinar or youtube video on a professional topic that interests you. Share your ideas with colleagues during school level PD or district PD. Consider being a speaker for one of our Basecamps - Teachers Teaching Teachers. *Click Here to Sign Up!* Celebrate others. Use social media, emails or hand-written notes to celebrate and thank colleagues who have inspired you. Be specific so others can learn from you.

HANDS-ON LABS & CLASSES
VIRTUALLY?

AREYOUSERIOUS?

by Paula McClain

Let's face it, this new era of teaching has ushered in LOTS of new challenges for us all...but ESPECIALLY for those of us who have hands-on courses and labs! How are we supposed to have students participate and interact with things that are hands-on when they are at home? I mean, COME ON... THIS IS A REAL CHALLENGE LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

Step back, take a deep breath, and know that you can do this. It is, however, going to mean changing the way you think about your course. YOU are the one who will need to change DRAMATICALLY in order for your online students to really get the hands-on experience they deserve.

Chemistry and Science labs, Ceramics and Painting, English and Social Studies projects...it's really all the same for our virtual learners here.

FIRST – THINK APPS!

First, you need to think creatively. Is there an app your students can download to give them the same sort of experience that you are doing in the classroom? The answer is probably YES! Now, I know you are thinking apps are not the same as doing something with their hands. Of course not, but...they are used to apps/games and will honestly try just about any of them.

There are apps for virtually "mixing" chemicals, creating virtual pottery, manipulating 3-D images, and the list goes on. This day and age there is an app for everything. The key, of course, is to try to find ones that are free, school appropriate, and coordinate with your projects/labs. This means, not only do you have to take time to search the app store, but you must download the app and play it over and over and try it out to make certain it fits your needs. I know this takes time, but students are already going to be on their phones playing games...why not for your course!? If you are not well versed in the apps that are available, ask around or search. You will be surprised at what is out there ready and waiting for you to utilize for your class.

NOW, I KNOW YOU ARE THINKING… CHEMISTRY IS NOT ANYTHING LIKE POTTERY… *OR IS IT?*

There are four things you can do to help your online learners:

1. Think apps
2. Think broad skills
3. Think substitutes for supplies
4. Don't shy away from different activities for online learners

Students can screenshot their virtual work and send it to you via email, put it in a google doc (with a writing piece about what they learned), or even upload it to Canvas in a Discussion Board for you... whichever way is easiest for you.

SECOND – THINK BROAD SKILLS

What EXACTLY is the fundamental skill you want them to learn? Not how are you doing it in class, but what is the specific skill? This is thinking about your course in a VERY DIFFERENT way. And, you must think lesson by lesson, lab by lab, and project by project.

Let me give you an example: in Ceramics, students must learn to wedge clay in order to make the clay homogenous and workable. So, that skill is something students need to do hands-on. How can they do that at home? IT'S EASY ONCE YOU OPEN YOUR MIND...they could use: play dough, modeling clay, homemade air dry clay, pizza dough, cookie dough, bread dough, and the list goes on and on. If the skill is wedging; that's pretty much the same as kneading bread dough...Why not have them do a baking project with their parent in the kitchen? Students could make unleavened bread (using: flour, water, oil, and salt) with their parents. The skill has been hands-on and they did it at home. They could then send you a video or images of them doing the project with their family. (BTW - This also encourages parents to take a more active role in their child's education!)

Thinking along the Chemistry and Science lab line, what could they do in the kitchen that would mimic the lab you are doing in class? What bases and acids are in the kitchen that they could use? Some of the things you may find that they could do in the kitchen or even outside may seem elementary and extremely fundamental, but they would still work. Anything involving earth science just BEGS for students to get outside and get their hands dirty! Again, they will easily take videos, TikToks, or snap pics of what they do to share with you.

THIRD – THINK SUBSTITUTES FOR SUPPLIES

We must really be thinking about our online kiddos and what they have access to when they work at home especially for hands-on lessons. We must literally write down options for them to use because this is new for them and they may not be thinking creatively at all. Some students honestly have difficulty following the basic instructions after all.

Stop and think for a moment, you want them to do a poster project... but on what? List for them options: poster board, construction paper, thin cardboard (like the inside of a cereal box), a manilla file folder, the inside of an old folder from a previous class will even work. However, if you do not list the options, they will end up emailing you multiple times trying to figure it out.

Let me give you another example, you want them to paint a project... but with what? Here are some viable options: watercolors, poster paint, shoe polish, leftover house paint, food coloring (yes, it works as paint on some services), powdered kool-aid (add a few drops of water and it is paint), or they could use glitter glue...there are different options if we broaden our thoughts on how to approach the projects.

When we, as educators, open our minds to the options, the success rate for our online learners increases dramatically.

FOURTH – DON'T SHY AWAY FROM DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES FOR ONLINE LEARNERS

Just because your in-person students are doing a hands-on project, does not necessarily mean your online learners have to. THERE IS NO RULE STATING THAT ALL STUDENTS MUST DO THE EXACT SAME THING EVERY DAY. This could possibly make a bit more work for you, trying to plan two different lessons, but it may well be worth it for a certain project or lab. While in-person students are doing a lab activity, your online learners may be reading and writing about something similar that coincides with what you are doing in the lab. You do not need to feel badly about this at all. You are giving them the information they need but in a different way. In this new era that we have embarked on...learning takes many new forms.

Your in-person students may be doing an activity with the water cycle where they are experimenting with different soils, while your online learners may be using their phones to photograph the different parts of the water cycle (around where they live) to put into a PowerPoint presentation.

Broadening our minds, opening up our way of thinking, and experimenting with new materials...that is the key to really helping our online learners make the most of their time in our courses. Hands-on in the home can still be very much hands-on. Students can still experiment and get involved by doing rather than sitting.

Teachers who think outside of the box will be rewarded with students that cannot wait to get to your online class to see what you are going to have them to do.

Making the Grade

REIMAGINING THE TESTING EXPERIENCE THROUGH ALTERNATE FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

by Dr. Rhonda Kilgo & Jasmine Rosemon

WHY NOW?

"Siri," "Alexa," "Hey Google," are all common names heard today, and these "friends" who once provided quick information or entertainment have now become helpers when students have questions on assignments and assess ments that they need assistance with. Try it: ask Siri to solve a math problem, tell you the result of a science experiment, translate a passage, give you the highlights of a particular event in history, summarize a book, and the list goes on. To further complicate matters it is 2020. Students are doing more educational work with the assistance of technology than ever before, and we as teachers are challenged to provide grades which are a true indicator of students' proficiency and which move them toward graduation. In these challenging times, Siri, Alexa, and Google may no longer be our friends.

WHERE DO WE START?

At one time (seems like only a year ago), traditional tests (as long as they were rigorous and on grade level) provided the necessary information that we needed to test students' mastery of content. Today, we are being asked to teach students in both traditional and virtual settings. In order to reduce workload, we need to find alternate ways to evaluate students' mastery which can be used in multiple settings. While our current situation may have forced us to take a different approach when it comes to assessments and grading, it has provided us a unique opportunity to try some new things which research has shown benefits all students. After all, George Cuoros, an esteemed author and education scholar, did say, "Change is the opportunity to do something AMAZING!" But let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

Traditional assessments are still needed and necessary for building students' confidence and stamina in taking high stakes tests.

Thus, these should not be completely discounted or eliminated altogether. Instead, certain questions should be asked during the developmental stage. Perhaps, questions like: "how can we be sure that students truly understand the content without the speculation of them simply Googling the answer?" And "how do we maintain equality between the students in the classroom, who are being monitored by a teacher, and virtual students who are completing assessments online, without direct supervision?" One answer might lie in the work we ask the students to provide in addition to the answer. While Googling the answer to a multiple choice question might be easy, asking students to provide justifications for their answers ups the challenge and makes it more likely that students can't just ask Siri or Alexa. There are several LDC (Literacy Design Collaborative) mini tasks which can be used that ask students to do just that. A free account providing access to these tasks can be accessed at _ldc.org_. What could be even more challenging is for students to provide justification for why the other choices wouldn't be correct; in other words, requiring them to bring their process of elimination to light and allowing us access into their desired critical thinking. Testing accountability is a major reason why some rely solely on traditional assessments. However, adding the component of student answer justifications allows us to continue this practice but making it even more impactful by giving us a more accurate depiction of the students' level of understanding.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In addition to implementing traditional assessments with the extension of requiring students to justify their responses, we could provide other alternative forms of assessments like oral exams, rubric based projects, journals, presentations, and/or portfolios to give students opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in various ways. This could potentially highlight strengths or areas which need growth that may not be noticeable on a traditional assessment. We've all heard the common statements, "everyone isn't a good test taker" or "he or she just doesn't test well." While this may very well be true, it just further proves the fact that a traditional, standardized test should not be the only means of evaluating a student's understanding. Incorporating other assessment types into the current teaching and learning culture provides us with the opportunity to minimize students' test anxiety, while also preparing them for academic and professional success outside of school.

Giving students choice in their learning and assessments might be another way for us to actually see what students understand and the depth of that knowledge. John Spencer, a well known speaker and educator on student engagement, talks about this. By providing choices where students can display their learning, we are able to assess what students understand because they are more likely to give their best efforts. One way of doing this is through choice boards. Mr. Spencer gives an easy-to-follow tutorial on four types of choice boards which can be created in _The Four Ways to Craft Choice Boards_, a recorded webinar. Both John Spencer and George Cuoros speak about Wonder Hour, Wonder Day, or Wonder Week where students can apply what they have learned in one of these time frames (an hour, a day, or a week). How exciting would it be

to see what students wonder about in relation to our content? Of course, we have to consider how we will ensure that students have mastered the content and standards. Mr. Spencer and Mr. Cuoros make it very clear that these are well thought out and developed activities where all of the choices help to show mastery and where the guidelines given for these "Wonder Times" move students to apply what they have learned.

What about those students who need to be able to explain themselves in words or writing rather than taking a traditional assessment? How do we give these students the opportunity to show mastery or are we leaving them out? Providing assignments where students justify themselves, video themselves giving an explanation or answering questions, or submitting a journal entry where we outline for the students what we are looking for might function as a better assessment. Students could be asked to submit presentations such as podcasts, blogs, videos, and many others. In _Podcasts Can Work in Any Subject_, Spencer provides ideas for having students develop these. These are only a few ideas of how we can change the way we assess and possibly change the way students view assessments.

WHAT ABOUT OUR STUDENTS?

According to Stephanie Lee (2015), assessments should reflect the desired skills that students are to develop. We don't want students to graduate only knowing how to master a standardized test or having anxiety associated with the self-perception of their inability to do so. Instead, we want students to learn how to navigate through life outside of school, effectively communicating with others, and confidently articulating their thoughts. Recent research has indicated that employers of today are looking for candidates with a variety of skills such as, critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication to name a few. As educators, our primary focus is to prepare students to compete in the collegiate and professional world. In _The Innovator's Mindset_, George Cuoros (2015) reminds educators that the goal is not to control students but to empower them to reach their highest potential. Empowering students to succeed in school and life means that we pay attention to the skills companies are seeking and develop assessments which reflect the expectations of students acquiring those skills.

Alternative assessments or alternatively using traditional assessments has a number of benefits for all stakeholders. These propel students to think critically and broaden their horizon of brain activity, strengthening their academic knowledge with in-depth understanding that will contribute to their long term success. All in all, alternative assessments could be the key to addressing some major educator concerns, as administering them gives us a variety of data to accurately represent student achievement without the worry of academic dishonesty or maximized anxiety. It also demonstrates adequate attempts to ensure college and career readiness for all students.

If you are interested in incorporating alternative assessments into your instructional practices, check out the link below for specific ideas, examples, and further research to find a resource compiled by members of the Secondary Curriculum team.

Alternative Assessment Ideas
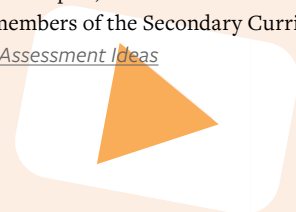
Innovative Tech Tools for the Interactive Classroom

by Erin Barrios & Stephanie Cotnam

Over the last eight months, there has been an extreme increase in the number of free tech tools at our disposal. Deciding which tool to incorporate into your classroom can be overwhelming. Will the tool be free in the future? Does the tool enhance my lesson? Can the tool increase interactive learning in the classroom? The questions go on and on. We wanted to take the time to highlight 3 interactive tech tools that we feel have staying power for your classroom. These tech tools will help with building community, fostering communication, and increasing engagement.

Nearpod

Nearpod is an interactive lesson platform that allows you to create engagement while formatively assessing students both in the classroom and at a distance. Bringing students together whether at-home or in-class; teachers can create lessons that can be accessed live with the teacher, or set to student-led for independent learning. Imagine being able to combine simulations, gamification, virtual field trips, formative assessments, and Flipgrid into a single seamless lesson.

This is a great tool for spicing up your current presentations! Use a PowerPoint, PDF, or Google Slides presentation you already have and convert it to an interactive nearpod lesson. Assessments and game based assessments will provide excellent analytics for teachers in the "reports" area. Nearpod has a great FREE version. Take advantage of this free option to create highly engaging activities and lessons for your students. If you would like to learn more about Nearpod you can watch our PD session from September, reach out to your Instructional Technology Specialist, or you can also checkout Nearpod.com/resources for loads of teacher resources!

Microsoft Immersive Reader

Looking for innovative tech tools to assist English Language Learners? Look no farther than Microsoft's new Immersive

Reader! This too is a FREE tool! English Language Learners, Dyslexic students, and struggling readers will benefit from Immersive Readers' advanced features. Use this tool to foster communication and understanding during your lessons both in the classroom and at home.


This tool allows you to change the background color for easier reading. Toggle between dark mode to colored overlays while reading text. Students can choose easier to read font types as well as sizes. This tool will even read aloud the document for students. The computer reader can read at various levels and speeds in addition to numerous languages. Microsoft's Immersive This nifty tech tool can be found in Canvas, Flipgrid, and Nearpod. Teachers can create Pages in Canvas that will allow students to access this great resource. A button will appear in the upper right corner of ALL Canvas Pages that says "Immersive Reader." Just click the button to access. Immersive Reader is automatically included in any Flipgrid topic as a small icon. Struggling to find these resources, reach out to your instructional technologist for assistance.

Jamboard

Looking for ways to have students work collaboratively while still following the social distancing guidelines? Covid and social distancing have really shed a light on how large a role collaboration plays in our classrooms. With increased spacing, we are finding out that we are distancing ourselves more than just the 6 feet at times. It is becoming increasingly obvious that we want and need our students to work collaboratively. Jamboard allows for students to work together or individually on an online "Jam." Jamboard can be used for

graphic organizers, shared charts, digital thinkspace, digital poster, whiteboard, story map, or diagram!

How do you access Jamboard? Jamboard is actually a newer app in the Google Suite for Education. It is accessible on MacBooks, iPads, Android devices, and Chromebooks.
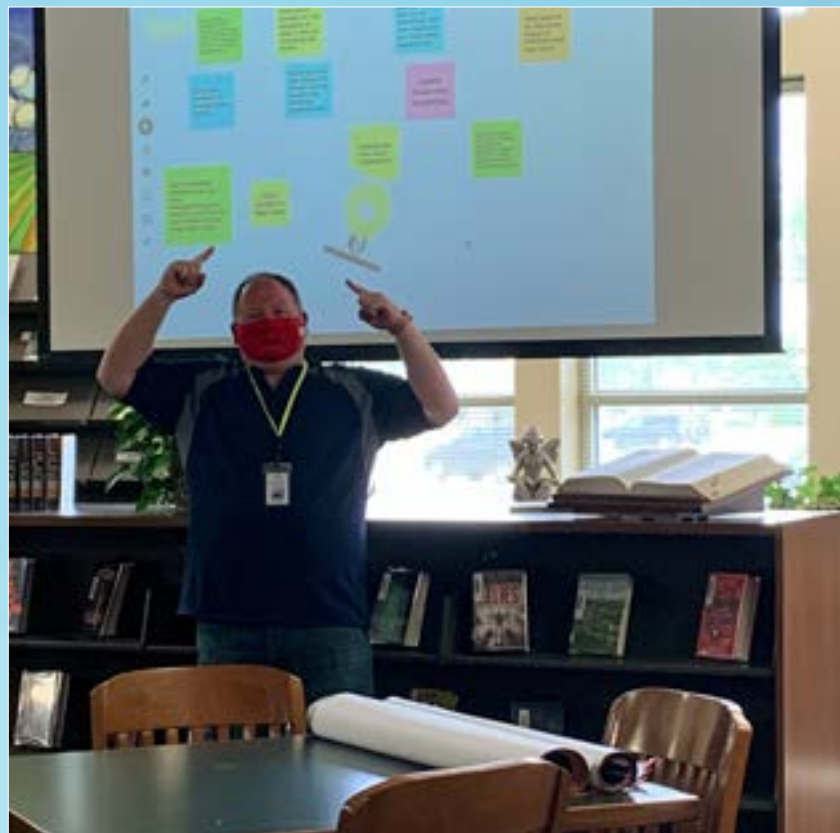

Jamboard was used for a recent administrators meeting, and has already been implemented by Dr. Dudley at Richland High School. Please share your Jamboard lessons with your instructional technologist. We would love to see what you are doing in the classroom.

If you would like to learn more about Jamboard, we disucced this topic in depth in our October 14th Professional Development session.

Tech Tips

- Teachers will receive new devices in May. Are you ready to swap your device? Begin backing up and moving material off of your device and saving it to Google Drive.
- Giving a test or benchmark? Make sure that students restart their device before beginning their assessment. It will make everything run smoothly.
- Broken board? MacBook woes? Wifi Issues? Remember that tech help is only a Work Order away!
- Please reach out to your Instructional Technologist for 1:1 assistance. Erin Barrios at Eri508@rcsd.ms and Stephanie Cotnam at Ste207@rcsd.ms.
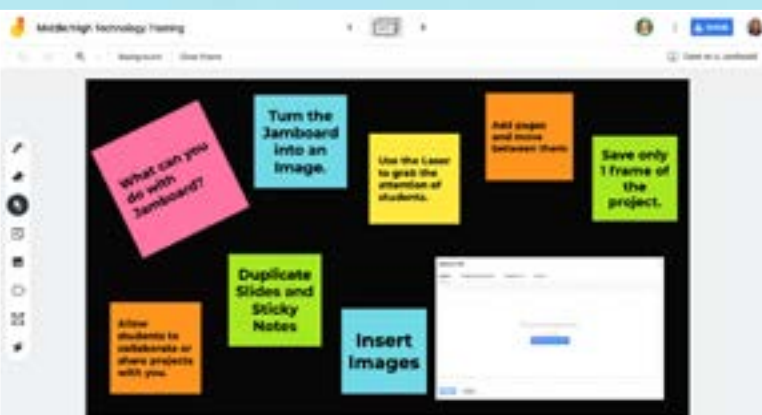
Creating Your Own

by Catherine Beasley

VIRTUAL PD

Research shows that professional development helps you become a more effective teacher. As a result of this pandemic, teachers have taken to social media and the internet to create, find and share ideas. We have collaborated across content areas and across the globe. We have listened to one another's hardships and success stories. Throughout these nine weeks, I have talked with so many teachers that are trying new things and really stepping out of their box. Whether it be out of necessity or terror, things are changing in classrooms everywhere. I wanted to share with you a few tips and tricks I've picked up along the way. Most of these are things that we have talked about at some point over the last few months ... just some new features!

FLIP GRID

This tool is great for video responses! Flipgrid helps students and teachers add a voice in the classroom. We have learned that this can be a tool that can be used for individual reflection responses or used for formative checks of understanding on a particular topic.

YouTube Video: What's New in FlipGrid 2020

USING STICKY NOTES IN FLIPGRID: This is a function that gives students an opportunity to bullet out or list what he or she wants to talk about in their video before recording. It will show up on the screen as they are recording. What a great way for students to think through what they want to say before creating their video! Students will see the notes on the screen as they record. The notes will not be seen in the video once the student submits the video. How cool!

YouTube Tutorial: Adding Sticky Notes to your Flipgrid Video

PROVIDING INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK IN FLIPGRID: A great new function that gives the teacher the ability to provide TEXT feedback to individual student videos. Being able to give students text feedback is a gamechanger and can really help move student learning forward. Previously students and teachers could only respond with another video! This private text option for feedback can help refine student thinking, move student thinking forward, or allow for peer feedback based on a teacher rubric. With that being said, you can also create a rubric for use with the videos in Flipgrid.

Article: Flipgrid Tutorial – Providing Private Feedback to Student Videos

Article: Flipgrid Tutorial – Providing Feedback through Basic and Custom Rubric

Follow *@flipgrid* for all the up to date information on Flipgrid and you can find The Infused Classroom *@ HollyClarkEdu*

GOOGLE SLIDES

Many of us have switched over to using Slide Decks for our presentations, lectures, and daily agendas/activities. This is a phenomenal tool that allows students to share their work with us or other students, allows for an opportunity to comment and provide feedback, as well as share out with many students at once to allow them to work collaboratively. While collaboration is the name of the game, it is hard when we have to keep students 6 feet apart or we have some at home and some face to face. Google Slides makes it so easy to allow students to edit at the same time and frees your time up for feedback and formative checks on the assignments.

CREATING SLIDES FOR STUDENT COLLABORATION: This tutorial video offers ideas for how to allow students to collaborate in Google Slides. While the video is a few years old, the practicality of the thinking is exactly what can help right now. There are some great tips and tricks! Below I've listed some that are particularly useful for NOW ...

YouTube Tutorial: Collaboration in Google Slides

2:35 Step 3: Create slides for every student in the class
4:00 Ways to share the presentation with students
6:10 Step 5: Have students get to work on their assignment
11:00 Step 6: Add comments for student collaboration
13:15 Tips for great student comments
16:30 How to make sure every student in class gets comments
21:00 Ninja trick 2: Set background to make items non-moveable
24:30 Ninja trick 3: Copy/paste groups of slides repeatedly
25:40 Ninja trick 4: Stash useful images around the slide

Find Matt Miller on Twitter **@jmattmiller** or at his website **ditchthattextbook.com**

Another cool way to utilize Google Slides is by creating a template for the thinking routines many of you already use in your classroom. I've seen these thinking routines used within many classes throughout our district as walk- abouts with post-it notes, reflection questions in journals, and exit tickets. Typically students utilize these strategies over and over again as we work through content.

One of the things I've found is from Catlin Tucker. She has a great post on these strategies (linked below) and has created a slide deck format for a few of the thinking routines from the **Project Zero** website from Harvard. Using these strategies in a slides format would allow you and the students to see growth over time on a particular skill. It also allows an opportunity for teacher feedback and individual reflection on student writing.

Website: Online Learning
Thinking Routines in Google Slides
Slide Deck: Thinking Routine - See, Think, Wonder

Slide Deck: Thinking Routine - Claim, Evidence, Questioning

Slide Deck: Thinking Routine - I Used to Think ... Now I Think

Catlin Tucker is a wonderful person to follow (on all platforms :) She has some really great innovative thinking and shares some awesome ideas and strategies.

Find Catlin Tucker on Twitter **@catlin_tucker** or at his website **catlintucker.com**

TIMERS IN GOOGLE SLIDES: Something that helps our classes run smoothly is good time management and this is a very important part of planning out our instructional sequence for the class day. While Google Slides doesn't offer a timer, putting them in a presentation is very easy. Using timers is such an easy way to keep us on track, as well as help students stay focused and on track. Too often we say, "you've got 10 minutes for this activity" and then 10 minutes turns into 15 or 20 or more! When that happens, our whole plan for the day is now out of whack! Keeping a timer on the slideshow is very helpful to keeping students engaged in the task at hand and to keep you on track. You can always negotiate a few more minutes or so, if needed!

YouTube Tutorial: Adding Timers in Google Slides

This tutorial offers a quick and easy way to add a timer to your Google Slides presentations. He also adds some quick tips on how to continue running the timer as you switch to other slides!

One of the cool things I've found in my social media pd is this teacher that uses Google Slides with a timer as her Welcome Slide. For this specific, screen share she created a background for her slide and added the timer over the picture.

Follow her **@KSCoffeeTeacher**

WHAT TIPS & TRICKS WILL YOU KEEP?

What tips and tricks have you learned that you would want to share with others in the district?

Follow **this link** to add your thoughts!

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON HIGH STAKES TESTING

BY MONTGOMERY HINTON

Well, Covid-19 impacted high stakes testing. Please make sure you read this *article* on how COVID impacted high stakes tests and how the ACT motivates students to be prepared!

While it caused the cancellation of state-wide assessments and the district ACT testing, the national ACT continued to try. The April ACT was cancelled nationally. So, many students were left without places to take the test and, often, were unwittingly rolled over into other testing sites and dates. The June test day almost 250,000 students registered for the test; however, less than 60,000 actually found seats because ACT went to great lengths to increase safety standards. This resulted in many testing centers simply opting to not give the test, some even at the last minute. The July ACT went much smoother as students found centers accommodating to the new standards.

ACT then rolled out multiple test dates in September and October to help get testing backlogs caught up.

The district tested all juniors who opted into the test on October 6, 2020. Additionally, the district allowed sophomores and seniors who wanted to take a school day test to test with the juniors. Additionally, all ninth graders are participating in a PreACT test to help prepare them for future ACT testing.

In advance of the test, the district purchased Method Test Prep for every 9-12 grade student. This app is available for each student under his or her Clever app. Then, locate the Method Test Prep app, open it, log in, and work at your own pace! It even has two full length ACT practice tests!

Handouts on English, Math, Reading, and Science are being distributed and are available should you be unable to find them. Simply email a request *here*.

The ACT testing dates can be found *here*.

ACT general preparation help can be found *here*. ACT English general help can be found *here*. Each of the sub sections of the English test have individual tabs with additional resources. ACT math general help can be found *here*. Subsections of math have individual tabs with additional resources. ACT reading general help can be found *here*. Subsections of reading have individual tabs with additional resources. ACT Science general help can be found *here*. Subsections of science have individual tabs with additional resources.

Many people have asked about single section retesting by the ACT. While this has been delayed from its original rollout date of September 2019, information can be located *here*. As for superscoring, information on this new feature from the ACT can be found *here*.

National Merit numbers in our county have continued to increase. This test only counts during your Junior year. This year the district offered the PSAT to our students on October 29, 2020, during the school day. Also, the students will receive a copy of their tests and when his or her score report returns-a copy of the answers, both the student's and the correct answer.

Preparation for the test can be done using the Method Test Prep SAT portion of the app. Since the SAT is the larger version of the PSAT, preparation for the SAT will adequately prepare students for the PSAT. The district has a resource page for PSAT/SAT preparation that can be found *here*. Specific help on Reading and writing can be found *here*. SAT math specific help can be found *here*. So, practice hard! Be ready.

Tips and Tricks to Easily Create Digital Lesson Agendas

by Sheri Blankenship

The classic line from *The Wizard of Oz*—"Lions, and tigers, and bears, oh my!" might resonate as the official feeling of preparing to teach in 2020. Many of us have experienced the realization that, for now, at least, we are "not in Kansas anymore." Our line might be something like "900 tabs open, face-to-face masked students, and choice students all at the same time, ***OH MY!***"

While intentional planning has always taken plenty of time and effort, this year has brought us additional challenges with the need to make sure that all of our students, regardless of whether they are face-to-face or virtual, have access to everything they need to be successful. Organization, especially digital organization and planning, has been especially critical to meeting the needs of our students and our colleagues. Finding ways to do this efficiently and well can certainly be a challenge, but there are some opportunities through this experience as well that I would dare say might have long-lasting organizational benefits as well.

Over the past six years of organizing and planning for professional development days in our district, I have found some digital tips and tricks that help me gather everything I need in one place. In fact, I have even developed my own style of creating an agenda as a landing page for these professional development days that can be replicated over and over so that I am not bogged down with structure or logistics and can instead spend my time planning the content portion of the day which is, of course, the most important part. In fact, if you and I have been in professional development together in the past few years, you probably had an agenda shared with you that looked something like this:

Rankin County School District
TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

PLUS Planning Day Agenda
October 28, 2020 8 A.M.-1:45 P.M.

October 28- February 2

Unit Study Cycle	Time	Agenda Item	Minutes/Notes
Whole Group	15 min.	Welcome **Norms:** Be positive.	Unit Study Cycle Lunch Tray
Student Work Analysis	45 min.	Student Work Protocol(s) → PQP → Student Work Notes Document → Student Work Samples	Oct. 28 Student Work Notes Oct. 28 Student Work Samples
Standards Breakdown Expert Groups	30 min.	**Socratic Seminar:** → Select 3 → Rank → Discuss	Standards Planning Document
Instructional PD			
Assessment 40-45 min.		Crowdsource Assessment Items Eleven Eleven Eleven A Call to Unite A Call to Unite A Call to Unite	Question Stems RL RI

The organization of this type of document allows me to use tables to separate out blocks of time to be used for different content purposes. Through the use of the columns, I am able to think through and plan out how much time should be spent on each portion of the day and to better ensure I pace the day out in a realistic way for the amount of time we have together. Additionally, with the column to the far right, I am able to link all of the documents or slide shows or activities needed for my use and for the participants to have access to in one spot instead of keeping a million tabs open with each thing I will need for the day. Additionally, putting all the links on the document ahead of time allows me to reduce my time trying to share each individual link needed with all participants while we are actually in session as I simply share the whole agenda with the group at the beginning of the day, and they receive an email notification with a link to open the agenda in its entirety.

While professional development agendas are not what we are creating in the classroom, the idea of an organizational agenda for the day's lesson has been a part of my routine for years; the agenda in my classroom was simply written on the whiteboard each day so that I could stay on pace and the students knew what the plan for the day was. The use of this digital daily agenda, however, gives me much more versatility in providing links to all my handouts or resources we need to use in the daily lesson. Because of the versatility and opportunity to put everything in one place for me and for students, this digital version of my daily agenda is something that I would use as a staple in the structure of my lesson planning long after the adjustments we have had to make because of Covid this year. Having all my resources needed for the day's lesson in one place is certainly critical for my sanity and for the efficiency with which I can transition in my online instruction, but choosing to create and link to my agendas digitally as the way to plan my lesson sequences allows me to avoid having to "double do" one plan for face-to-face and a different plan for my choice students, further ensuring equity for all of my students.

The pictures below show samples of how I might translate this idea of a professional development agenda or a whiteboard agenda for digital organization to my daily lessons and units in the classroom.

DATE:		
LEARNING TARGET(S):		
Time	Agenda	Resources
10 min.	Bellringer	
20 min.	Mini-Lesson	
40 min.	Application	
10 min.	Closing	

OCTOBER 21, 2020

LEARNING TARGET(S):
- I can create a claim informed by multiple perspectives on an issue
- I can evaluate the relevance of evidence from a text to support a claim
- I can support a claim with logical and relevant evidence

Time	Agenda	Resources
15 min.	Bellringer	Building an Effective Argument Notekeeper [see Bellringer section for October 21]
30 min.	Application **Please open your Claim & Evidence Organizer from 10/19.**	Adding to Our Thinking: • Today article [#3 Additions/Changes section] • Write your claim! [Claim section]
30 min.	Mini-Lesson	How to Select the most relevant evidence Ranking Evidence
10 min.	Closing Exit Slip	Building an Effective Argument Notekeeper [see Exit Slip section for October 21]

Many of us have experienced the realization that, for now, at least, we are "not in Kansas anymore."

Moving from a blank Google doc to an ongoing template you can use for running daily agendas is fairly simple once you have had a chance to familiarize yourself with some tools in Google docs and/or Google slides. But, if you are like me, the time needed to figure out the logistical side of getting your template created may be overwhelming in light of everything else we are working to figure out on a daily basis. And, ultimately, the real power in using this type of agenda lies in the quality of the content we place inside of it as an organizational tool for our content! To help reduce the heavy lift of time of figuring out how to do some of these things, and so you can jump to being able to use this digital agenda in your classroom, I have created four short videos where I walk you through how to create these for yourself! These videos are linked below along with a short explanation of what is covered in each segment so that you can pick and choose what might be useful to you, and so you can pause and play as needed while you create your own versions of the digital lesson agenda.

Click here for the *Segment 1 video* which shows how to use tables in Google docs to create your digital agenda template.

Click here for the *Segment 2 video* for tips and tricks for creating clear transitions for students using color inside the agenda.

Click here for the *Segment 3 video* that shows how you can use Google slides instead of Google docs to create digital agendas.

Click here for the *Segment 4 video* which shows how to collaborate with other colleagues asynchronously through Google docs.

Brandon
Florence
McLaurin
Northwest
Pelahatchie
Pisgah
Puckett
Richland

Rankin County School District

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