

## *Moving into a new year...*

Well, it finally happened. We finally put an end to the year 2020, the year that in many ways felt like it would never end. The year that just kept piling on. A global pandemic, racial unrest, economic hardships, a contentious election... would it never end? This year took a toll on us, personally and professionally, as we watched and worried, responded and reacted, and tried to make sense of events that felt like they were completely outside of our control. By nature, I believe I am basically an optimist. I tend to believe that things will work out, things happen for a reason, all will be well in the end... but even for an optimist, this year was tough.

However, being the optimist that I am, as we turn the calendar to 2021, I think it's worth pointing out that a lot of good things actually happened in 2020 and a lot of those good things happened right here in our PCSD community. We rallied together to raise money (lots of money) for gift cards to purchase food for families in need. Puppies (lots of puppies) were adopted. Babies were born. We furthered our efforts to integrate literature and historical perspectives representing diverse voices into our classrooms. We welcomed over 60 new staff members to our district. Together, we figured out how to welcome our students back into our Temporary Learning Models in September with health and safety protocols that have allowed us to remain open even as the greater community has experienced a significant surge in positive coronavirus cases. We have collaborated across all levels of the organization to problem-solve through the toughest challenges ever faced by public education. And, we have learned a great deal about how to effectively deliver remote instruction, using tools and strategies that many of us had never heard of or experienced 10 months ago.

In addition to being an optimist, I'm also a realist (and no, I don't think those traits are mutually exclusive). The realist in me says that we very likely have another six months of teaching and learning in our Temporary Learning Models. So, as much as we would like to think that turning the calendar to 2021 means everything goes back to normal, it doesn't. That means that we still have time to work together to make things better, for us and for our students, in our TLMS. Amazing things are happening in our classrooms. I know because I have had the privilege of witnessing many of those things. But the work has been challenging and has often raised more questions than answers. Questions about assessments, the use of cameras, technology apps, and more. The articles that follow will hopefully provide you with some helpful resources, ideas, and things to think about that might help to answer some of those questions.

As we enter the new year, I want to encourage us all to think about how we will be able to take what we have learned - and what we have learned to do - from this year and use it to inform our practices for years to come. As difficult as it has been to weather the storms of 2020, I do believe that we will come to think of this challenging year as one which truly transformed education in mostly positive ways. Realistically, we likely have another six months of feeling like our world in schools is turned upside down. Optimistically, we can do what we do best and use these six months to become better positioned to meet the ever-changing needs of our students for years to come in more creative and innovative ways than ever before.

Here's to a new year full of hope and promise, happiness and health!

Until next time... *Melanie*



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Cameras on?</i>	2
<i>Prioritizing our Time</i>	3
<i>High Leverage Tools</i>	4
<i>Assessing in our TLMS</i>	5
<i>More resources</i>	6

## *Is it really about the camera?*



Questions continue to arise regarding our ability to “require” students to have their cameras turned on during remote instruction. While it is certainly preferable, from the instructor’s perspective, to be able to see students faces, we also know that there are reasons why students might be uncomfortable having their cameras on. Rather than focusing on this as a compliance issue, it may be more helpful to think about reasons why we might need students to have their cameras on for some or all of our instruction, and ways that we can structure our time with them so that they will be encouraged to turn their cameras on.

Work with your students to establish some norms regarding the use of their cameras. While your preference might be for them to have their cameras on for the entire class, perhaps working together you can establish norms about when it’s expected that all students will have their cameras on and when it’s OK for camera use to be optional. Explain to students, for example, that you need everyone to have their camera on for the first three minutes of class so that you can visually confirm their presence and be able to greet them, and have them greet each other, face-to-face. Chances are, after three minutes many of them will forget to, or not bother to, turn their camera off.

Think about engaging your students in some quick ice-breaker, or community building, activities at the start of the lesson that will work to encourage cameras on within a safe environment. It’s tough to participate in a scavenger hunt, show-and-tell, or game of “pass the pen” without turning on your camera. Teaching students sign language greetings and incorporating those into your morning meeting will also get students to turn their cameras on.

Monitoring student engagement is often cited as a reason we need to be able to require students to have their cameras on. While it is understandable that being able to see faces feels like an important way to monitor student engagement, we all know from being in traditional classrooms that there is more to assessing engagement than just being able to see students’ faces. Just because a student is looking into the computer screen with their camera on does not necessarily mean they are any more or less engaged in the lesson than the student who has their camera off but may, in fact, be taking notes, making connections, and jotting down follow-up questions to ask in Teams later.

So, if seeing your students’ faces feels important to you, perhaps the real question needs to be, “Can you encourage student engagement in the learning in ways that require their cameras be turned on?” Consider transferring some of the same active engagement strategies from your traditional classroom into your virtual lesson. Ask students to show their work or record their answer to a question on a small white board (or white piece of paper) that they hold up to their camera for you to see. Teach your students a set of hand signals to use that will help you monitor engagement, and encourage participation, in a class discussion ([Using Hand Signals for More Equitable Discussions | Edutopia](#)). Think about the many ways index cards can be used to encourage camera-on engagement. For example, ask students to hold up an index cards to indicate their response (yes/no; true/false; agree/disagree; order of operations, etc.) for quick checks for understanding. Have students put key vocabulary words on index cards, one word per card. Then call on 3 students to each hold up a card and ask a fourth student to describe how those three terms are connected to each other. In a similar way, index cards with historical events or steps in a mathematical equation can be used with students needing to sequence the cards their peers are displaying. These, and many other simple engagement strategies require students to turn on their camera, at least for the duration of the activity!

*Instead of asking, “Should I require my students’ cameras to be on?” we should ask, “How do I create a learning space where students feel safe and comfortable turning their cameras on, where students want to see and be seen?”*

Alex Vanat  
Edutopia, 9/20202

The reasons that students do not turn their cameras on can be many and varied, just as the reasons that many adults turn their cameras off during a zoom meeting can be many and varied. The goal is not compliance; the goal is to create safe and comfortable learning spaces where students are actively engaged in the learning taking place. Bringing the same kinds of community building, SEL, and active engagement strategies to our virtual classrooms that we bring to our traditional classrooms can go a long way towards increasing the chances of being able to actually see our students faces on the screen. For more ideas and strategies related to this topic, please see the following resources:

[Strategies to Encourage Middle and High School Students to Turn Their Cameras On | Edutopia](#)

[The Value of a Camera-Optional Policy in K-12 Classes | Edutopia](#)

[Privacy and equity alternatives to video in online learning \(districtadministration.com\)](#)

## *Time is of the essence...*



Time has always been our most precious resource in schools. Time with our students, time with our colleagues, time for planning, time for sharing... we want more of all of it. And yet, the ability to create more time alludes us, so we need to learn how to make the most effective use of the time we do have. Never has that been more important than this year when the time we have with our students is more scarce than ever before. For a myriad of reasons that all go back to making our Temporary Learning Models work, most teachers have less direct “face time” with their students than in a normal year, and yet many feel the pressure to move through the curriculum at the same pace as always.

So, let’s start by acknowledging that this is not possible, or necessary! So stop. Stop right now feeling like you have to get through everything, cover everything, do everything you’ve done in a normal school year. This is NOT a normal school year. We are living through a global pandemic and as much as in some weird ways we have adjusted and gotten used to all things pandemic related, it is important to remind ourselves that things are not normal. Everything related to teaching and learning feels like it is more complicated and takes longer. Whether you are teaching general music from a cart that is wheeled from class to class, planning for first graders who are split up into two different rooms all day, trying to juggle the complexities of planning in the hybrid model, or trouble-shooting technology glitches for your remote learners, it is more complicated and it does take more time. That is just a reality this year; we all know it and we all need to accept it.

Since it is not possible to create more time, we have to prioritize the time we have. The Instructional Roadmaps that began to be developed over the summer are one important way to help you prioritize your time. The bottom-line agreement about the roadmaps is that if something doesn’t appear on the roadmap, it is not essential that it be taught this year. So, if you are feeling pressed for time, anchor yourself back to your roadmap. Use the roadmaps to help you prioritize and give yourself much needed permission to let go of what is not essential. If, five months into this school year, it feels like the roadmap for your course needs some adjusting, that’s work that can and should be undertaken collaboratively, under the direction of your standards leader, by all who are teaching the course.

Another way to prioritize your time is to keep things simple. As we have worked to embrace the world of remote learning, we have been bombarded with all the “shiny new toys” out there that promise to make our technology-based lessons worthy of being featured on our favorite teaching blog site. It’s easy to get distracted by temptations of the latest and greatest new tool or app that will suddenly make this whole synchronous/asynchronous teaching thing look and feel easy. In reality, there are no magic bullets out there and your best approach is to focus on two or three high leverage tools that you and your students will use consistently for teaching and learning, providing feedback, promoting reflection, and assessing student learning. (See the article on page 4 for some suggestions.) Using a few tools consistently and well will save you, and your students, a lot of time and frustration, and allow you to establish some predictable routines that are crucial for making effective use of your precious instructional time.

Finally, prioritize the face-to-face time that you DO have with your students. Use that time wisely. Focus on building and maintaining relationships. Check in with their mental health and stress level and let them know you care about them. Create opportunities for students to engage with one another and let their voices be heard. Learning is not a passive activity; it requires active cognitive engagement, risk-taking, and - for many students - social interaction. Structure your in-person time with your students to allow them time to make meaning of what they have been asked to do without you. Minimize the time spent doing tasks that they could do on their own; prioritize tasks that require your scaffolding or the input of their peers. And, finally, if you are teaching in the hybrid model avoid, to the greatest extent possible, using one of your two in-person days to administer full-period tests. Not only are students not benefiting from your instructional expertise when you do this, but we are hearing from students that their in-person days are being loaded up with as many as four or five tests on a single day. There are ways to assess student learning remotely that produce valid and reliable results, allowing you to prioritize your in-person time for other purposes. (See pg. 5 for some resources and ideas.)

So, while we can’t conjure up “more” time, we can encourage you to prioritize the time you do have by giving yourself permission to let go of the non-essentials, focus on keeping things simple, and most importantly, using the time with your students to do what you do best: build and foster relationships, focus on instruction, craft meaningful and cognitively engaging activities, and support student learning. If we do these things with the time we have, our time will be well spent and our students will be well cared for. What more could we ask for?

## *High leverage tech tools...*

The world of remote teaching has required educators to embrace the use of technology like never before. Technology and software vendors have rushed to fill any void we may have been experiencing in this arena. I'm sure that your email inbox is as cluttered as mine with pitches for the latest app designed to make remote teaching easier. Or, perhaps, your friend who teaches in a different district has raved about their use of a tool you've never heard of, but now are convinced you need to incorporate into your lessons. Whatever the cause, it's tempting to think that if you just learned how to do THIS, or if the district would only purchase THAT (whatever the THIS and the THAT are), then all of your problems would be solved.

The reality is that knowing how to effectively use a few select tools or applications is all you need right now, particularly if those tools can be used in a multitude of ways to provide instruction, promote learning, offer effective feedback, and assess student learning. Based on multiple conversations with K-12 teacher leaders (representing all variations of our Temporary Learning Models) about what's working well, the following tools and applications have risen to the top as possessing high leverage while also being simple to learn and use.



**Office365 Forms** - If you don't yet know how to create a Form in Office 365, you don't know what you are missing! Super simple to create (I promise, you can teach yourself this one in 5 minutes or less), Forms can be used for all types of assessment, from a quick a mid-lesson check for understanding, to a "ticket out the door", to a unit test. You can choose to set time limits on when the Form responses can be submitted, and all of your results come back to you graphically and in an excel spreadsheet making it easy to sort the data and look for patterns. This is a great option for turning traditional "paper and pencil" tests into something easily administered in a remote setting.



**FlipGrid** - FlipGrid is a free, simple to use platform that allows students of all ages to create a short video recording of themselves and share the recording with their teacher, or with the whole class! Rather than always asking students to provide a written response to a prompt, FlipGrid allows you to open up the possibilities for how students demonstrate their understanding. It is also particularly useful for any performance based assessment. FlipGrid fully integrates into Teams making it simple to incorporate into your current toolbox.



**SMART Learning Suite Online** - SMART Learning Suite is web-based software that works seamlessly across in-person and virtual classrooms. It is part of our licensing for the SMART boards currently in use in classrooms throughout the district (so there is no additional cost to the district) and is now integrated with Office 365. Among its many features are interactive lessons, graphic organizers, game-based activities, collaboration tools, and formative assessments. This is a great option, particularly for K-8 teachers, to explore.



**Nearpod** - Nearpod incorporates both content delivery and options for assessment using an engaging format. It can be used effectively in the traditional classroom as well as in the remote setting. Currently, we have a number of secondary teachers engaged in piloting Nearpod to help us with purchasing decisions for next year. If you are a secondary teacher and are interested in information about participating in the pilot program, please reach out to our Tech Services department or your standards leader.

Of course, there are a myriad of other websites and applications that teachers have been using which, if they are working well, can and should continue to be incorporated into your instructional planning. While some of the tools highlighted here have been used in the past by individual teachers, they have emerged as some of the most powerful tools to support teachers and students in our Temporary Learning Models. Part of their power lies in their simplicity and ability to meet multiple needs in terms of instruction, feedback, and assessment. Knowing how to effectively use a few of these tools, and using them consistently as part of your instructional repertoire, will not only help to build routines that are important for this year in our Temporary Learning Models, but may also serve to expand our collective repertoire of effective instruction, feedback, and assessment strategies that better meet the needs of our learners in future years. Opportunities to learn more about how to effectively use these tools will continue to be provided by our Instructional Technology staff and the Teacher Center.



## *Assessment in the remote setting*

The question of how to assess students in a remote setting has been a topic of frequent conversation this year, for understandable reasons. Whether the issue is concerns about academic honesty, the ability to provide timely feedback to a formative assessment task, or the logistics of administering a “tried and true” assessment remotely, many teachers have expressed that they are struggling to find ways to assess students virtually while ensuring the results of those assessments are valid and reliable.

The good news is, like most things related to education during a pandemic, we are not alone. There are lots of articles written by teachers of all types who are struggling with the same questions and coming up with some creative ideas. Here are just a few examples, full of good ideas, to share:

[Formative and Summative Assessment in Hybrid Middle and High School Classrooms | Edutopia](#)

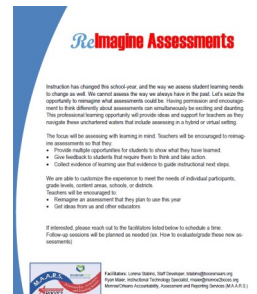
[7 Ways to Do Formative Assessments in Your Virtual Classroom | Edutopia](#)

[Assessments in a Virtual Environment | DaVinci Education \(davinci-ed.com\)](#)

Our local BOCES can also be a great resource, not only for ideas, but for practical assistance in this area. They have developed a series of “quick courses” designed as free, one-hour asynchronous learning experiences that teachers can do on their own time, at their convenience. Two of those quick courses focus on some aspect of assessment and are listed below. Clicking on the hyperlink should take you to the registration page:

[Giving Effective Feedback to Students  
Student Self-Reflection and Self-Assessment](#)

Beginning in January, BOCES is also offering a completely customizable experience they are calling “ReImagine Assessments”. This is an opportunity for teams of teachers to come together, facilitated by a BOCES Staff Developer and Instructional Technology Specialist, to re-think, re-create, re-imagine, and revise an existing assessment tool to better fit today’s needs. This collaborative work could be done during a Wednesday afternoon PLC time, after school for Teacher Center credit, or during release time if it is a project that will require multiple hours of work. There is no registration link for this offering; interested departments should reach out to their Standards Leader to arrange a time for this facilitated work to take place.



**ReImagine Assessments**

Education has changed this school year, and the way we assess student learning needs to change as well. We cannot assess the way we always have in the past. Let's seize the opportunity to reimagine what assessments look like for today's students and tomorrow's world. This professional learning opportunity will provide ideas and support for teachers as they reimagine their assessment tools that include assessment in hybrid or virtual settings.

The goal of this learning will be to help teachers to reimagine their assessment tools to better fit today's needs. Teachers will be encouraged to reimagine their assessment tools to better fit today's needs.

- Create feedback opportunities for students to show what they have learned
- Create feedback to students that requires them to think and take action
- Collect evidence of learning and that evidence to guide instructional next steps

We are able to customize the experience to meet the needs of individual participants, grade levels, content areas, subjects, or districts.

Sign-up and/or registration:

- Register at [assessment@floridaboces.com](#) for this year
- Get ideas from us and other educators

If interested, please reach out to the facilitator listed below to schedule a time. Follow-up resources will be provided as needed. How to register: [assessment@floridaboces.com](#)

**Facilitators:** Lyndee Stearns, Staff Developer, [assessment@floridaboces.com](#)  
 Dawn Miller, Instructional Technology Specialist, [assessment@floridaboces.com](#)  
 Jennifer O'Connell, Instructional Technology Specialist, [assessment@floridaboces.com](#)

When it comes to concerns about academic honesty, the best defense is a good offense. Be upfront with your students about your expectations for their work at home. Be clear about what tasks should be done completely independently without the help of any resources (including other people) and for which assignments you allow, and even encourage, students to tap into multiple resources. Just as importantly, think about the degree to which your assessment tasks require students to engage in critical thinking, creative problem solving, explanations of their thinking, and authentic demonstrations of their learning - all of which decrease opportunities for “cheating” while raising the rigor and meaningfulness of the assessment. (See “ReImagine Assessments” above for an opportunity to make some simple adjustments in this direction to an existing assessment 😊.)

Several of the high leverage technology applications highlighted on pg. 4 of this newsletter can be used to modify your assessments and assessment practices to better fit the synchronous, asynchronous, or even the in-person environment. Finally, let’s not forget that we have amazing resources right here in our own district in the approximately 130 teachers who are teaching either full-time or part-time in the fully remote Temporary Learning Model. Many of them have, out of necessity, found reliable and successful alternatives to administering assessments in person.

Working together, and utilizing our resources, we can find ways to shift our practices and/or revise our assessment tasks to better meet the demands and restrictions of our Temporary Learning Models. As we learn what works this year, we may be discovering important ideas about assessment that will positively influence our work for years to come.

## *Some additional resources*

I continue to be on the lookout for resources that might be helpful as we learn and grow this year. In addition to the resources embedded in previous articles, here a few others that you may find interesting. There may be a nugget or two that could be helpful. If nothing else, sharing these resources serves as a reminder, once again, that we are far from alone in trying to figure this out!

[6 Lessons Learned About Better Teaching During the Pandemic - Education Week \(edweek.org\)](#)

[Connecting Students in a Disconnected World « Cult of Pedagogy](#)

[Remote Learning Is Not Going Away Soon. This Is How to Make It Better. | EdSurge News](#)

[How to Make Effective Videos for Learning](#)

*And finally, let's not forget, the reason we do it all ...*

