



From the Frontlines: First Full Week After School Buildings Reopened

By Educator Barnes – August 24, 2020

School buildings closed across the country last spring, and now, they are reopening. The reopening plans vary state to state, city to city, and from district to district. The options have been reopening 100% remotely, reopening in-person with the options for families to opt into

remote learning, or hybrid with students attending school in-person part of the time and remotely for the other part of the time. Of course, there are other variations; my school is a K-8 school. We decided that only students K-3 would attend in-person with the option for 100% remote learning, and students 4-8 are 100% remote.

Students returned last Monday, August 17, and I entered my 15th year as an educator. Last week felt like year one all over again. Just like my first year, I prepped and planned. I read all the guidance and directions, but implementation is a different ballgame. You try to plan for all the variables, but you cannot plan for everything.

This year, I'm on bus duty. My heart was filled with joy to see the school buses pull into the parking lot. Then, my heart dropped when I saw a student bounce off the bus, pass the temperature check, and attempt to hug a teacher. The teacher quickly pivoted to a no-contact air high five. Our K-3 students are back, but school is not back to normal.

After the joy and excitement of the K-3 entering campus, I walked upstairs to quiet halls. I work in the middle school portion of our building, but all of our middle school students are remote. The first day of school with the middle schoolers should involve several students trying to figure out their locker combinations. I never thought I would miss helping students with their locker combinations. Instead, students were trying to figure out their schedules on Google classroom and which zoom link they are supposed to use to attend class.

Remote learning is different this time around, and it is a lot more work for students and for staff. When school buildings closed in the spring, some schools didn't give grades or if they did, the students could not earn a grade lower than their grades from the previous quarter. This time the grades are real, and the stakes are higher as teachers try to figure out how to give high-quality content remotely.

My week was spent attending classes on zoom and helping teachers with their content. If I was not doing that, I was troubleshooting and helping teachers use technology more effectively. You can't solve everything such as the WiFi going out in the middle of the school day or dealing with the fact that websites students should have access to are blocked on their devices at home.

Having a device and access to a hotspot does not solve all the problems. Multiple students in the same house trying to attend class remotely can cause bandwidth issues. If headphones

aren't available and enough space to spread out from other siblings, it could also be difficult to learn.

That's just the remote side. Helping students keep masks on their faces and practice social distancing can be challenging especially for kindergarteners who are just now being introduced to the school. Some of these masks are too big for younger students' faces. Masks hide the emotions that teachers use to convey content. Even though the masks are helping to flatten the COVID-19 curve, there are some downsides for instruction.

Despite the challenges, there are some positive notes. Teachers are learning how to better use technology to teach. Students are learning with an increased rigor than they were in the fall. My hope is the tools we learn to use during the pandemic can keep being used once the pandemic ends.

The first week was exhausting, but the fuel that moved me forward was our students. I believe week two will be even better than week one. Week two, let's go!