



• School District Convening / Digital Learning Summit

Promoting Best Practice through Professional Reflection and Analysis of Practitioner Responses



Summary Conclusions

Pinellas County Schools

Teaching and Learning Division / Spring 2020







Introduction

Pinellas County Schools continues to monitor and learn from its most effective educators and school leaders in keeping with its commitment to best practice and continuous improvement. The school district on Florida's west coast is the 8th largest in Florida (among 67 total) and the 27th largest in the nation. The district has a total student enrollment of 99,798 (2019-20). It employs more than 7,000 teachers across 140 school sites.

In May of 2020, the district organized an assembly of teachers and coordinated a series of reflection efforts designed to gather professional insights from those who were successful in delivering instruction across distance learning platforms during the COVID-19 health crisis.

The purpose of the inquiry was to increase understanding and relay summary findings to district leadership in support of the following outcomes:

- Identifying model processes and exemplary teaching methods specific to digital learning.
- Affirming best practices to inform district strategic planning in support of blended learning models.
- Isolating areas for growth and further study in support of continuous improvement.

Best Practices Convening

The district gathered responses from identified teacher participants in May of 2020 at a Best Practices Convening hosted virtually by the district's Teaching and Learning Division and Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Research. A total of 134 teachers across all levels (elementary, middle, and high) attended the convening via Microsoft Teams to provide feedback via a protocol administered through Nearpod and facilitated by district staff. Additionally, each of the teachers was asked to complete a follow-up survey with questions specific to his or her experience with digital learning and perceptions of best practice. Seventy-two teachers responded to the survey.



Summary Conclusions / Key take-aways

Teachers described a largely successful implementation despite a steep learning curve and little preparation time necessitated by the health crisis. Teachers were resourceful in adapting their practice to the digital platform to support student learning. The teachers found value in digital learning and plan to adopt some form of blended instruction when students return to campus. Practitioner responses reflect new instructional methods that show promise in meeting the unique needs of learners, including greater personalization and individualized support.

Teachers and students utilized the digital tools provided by the school district and were creative in their approaches to build community and deepen learning. Still, teachers challenged assumptions that today's students possess an adequate command of digital literacy. The teachers expressed surprise at the limited technology abilities of some students across grade levels in navigating digital platforms and in using common office applications to complete their school work. Though most students had ready access to smartphones and regularly engaged with video games and social media, they had little practice and deftness in creating and sharing documents, organizing files, and executing standard keyboarding skills.

Teachers reported that common assumptions of student performance in a traditional classroom setting did not always match what they found in the digital environment. Teachers found that some struggling or previously disengaged students thrived in the digital platform, while the opposite was also evident at times. Participants reported that some shy and reserved students were flourishing, and that many students were finding success due to fewer classroom distractions within the online environment.

Conversely, some concerns for disadvantaged students were confirmed. Teachers expressed serious concerns for students they could not reach nor engage. Teacher responses suggest that profiles of successful or struggling learners in a traditional classroom cannot be assumed to match with those descriptors in a digital environment.

Teachers found that building and sustaining classroom community was critical even when engaging in distance learning. Teachers described creative methods for peer collaboration and engaging student voice, sometimes in ways that had not been utilized in the traditional classroom setting.

Teachers called for further exploration of digital tools (including cameras / video) to foster student

discussion and provide for socializing and team-building beyond academics. Respondents shared that communication and engagement with families increased and were vital to student success. Many teachers reported that they gained a deeper appreciation for the role that families play and a greater empathy for families and students who are balancing home, work, and school. Some teachers expressed that any definition of classroom community moving forward must involve three equal partners: teacher, student, and family.

Teachers described their move to digital learning as requiring a wide range of strategies that demands highly structured lesson plans and ongoing experimentation in keeping students engaged. Teaching loads, planning time, and instructional shifts were substantial and, at times,

burdensome. Teachers found that the digital classroom requires not just adopting technology, but front-loading lessons designed for each unique learner and family. The teacher experiences provide insight into creative adaptations of pedagogy specific to individualization and feedback, teacher-student relationships, and mindsets about time, place, and learning. Many teachers reported that they found the use of technology transformational in their practice and rewarding in their understanding of how students live and learn.





Implications for Future Practice

- Teachers must adapt their traditional classroom practices for digital learning to include opportunities for student collaboration (small group instruction, discussion boards, individual and group channels) using multiple platforms (e.g. Nearpod, Flipgrid, Kahoot, etc). To be successful, this will likely include opportunities for students to meet and interact with their teachers and peers across video formats.
- Teachers should consider how to adjust lesson delivery to meet the varied learning styles of students (pre-recorded lessons, live lessons, lecture notes) and utilize a variety of methods to monitor student learning and provide feedback (focused note-taking, small groups, one-on-one, peer groups) while sustaining rigor and engagement. This will require highly intentional lesson-planning specific to digital learning platforms.
- Teachers should be purposeful in building consistent structures and routines in the digital classroom so as to create successful conditions for learning, to assist in communicating with students and families, and to not overwhelm students with too many tasks and unfamiliar digital products / applications.
- Teachers must remain highly flexible in their expectations for students regarding deadlines, engagement in live lessons, quality and type of work products, etc. A deep understanding, appreciation, and empathy for students and their unique home environments will be required for all students to thrive.
- Schools should consider how to best build student computer literacy specific to basic keyboarding skills, keyboard shortcuts, saving and sharing documents, presentation software, emailing, and related technology skills.
- Schools should continue to offer and experiment with distance and blended learning. Teachers expressed excitement and commitment to continued use of digital resources even when students return to a traditional classroom setting. This will require the district and schools to strategically plan for the use of digital devices at home and the challenges of ensuring equitable access (internet service, etc.).
- Schools must continue to explore and develop lessons that are consistent with culturally relevant instructional practices, even across a digital platform. Teachers must be comfortable with creating relevant learning experiences, equitable grading practices, opportunities for voice and choice, building trust and community, and establishing deep family connections.



Data Collection

Participants

TEACHERS

- 174 teachers across the district were identified to participate.
 - o 79 ES teachers
 - o 38 MS teachers
 - o 27 HS teachers
 - 17 ESE teachers (various levels)
 - o 13 ESOL teacher (various levels)
- 134 teachers attended the convening (77%)
- 72 participated in the survey (41%)

Each teacher invited was selected by their school principal or a district content specialist as someone who was successful and creative in adjusting their traditional classroom practices to a digital learning platform.

Best Practices Convening / PCS hosted a Digital Learning Summit for all participants.

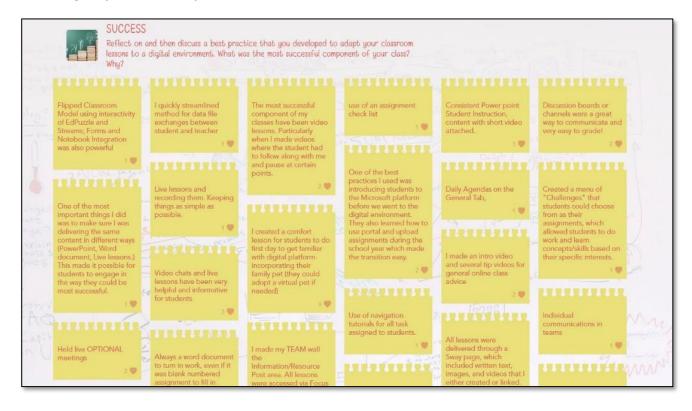
- 134 teachers attended. Participants were divided into 12 discussion groups.
- Participants were asked to respond to three prompts (see below), adapted from the Atlas Success
 Protocol. Nearpod Collaborate boards were used to capture responses, facilitated by Teaching and
 Learning and district research staff (see example below).
- 700+ responses were collected and reviewed.
- Nearly 12 hours of facilitated discussion was recorded and reviewed.

Convening Prompts:

- SUCCESS: Reflect on and then discuss a best practice that you developed to adapt your classroom lessons to a digital environment. What was the most successful component of your class? Why?
- CHALLENGE: Reflect on and then discuss the biggest challenge that you experienced as you adapted your classroom lesson to the digital environment. What strategies did you implement to overcome the challenge? If you were not able to overcome the challenge, what presented the greatest barrier to success?
- DISCOVERY: What surprised you (or concerned you) about how your students responded to digital learning?



Convening Responses / Example Below:



Participant Survey / Sent to each of the identified teachers.

- 72 responses (41.3% response rate)
 - o PK-2 / 13 responses
 - 3-5 / 31 responses
 - 6-8 / 14 responses
 - 9-12 / 14 responses
- 10 questions, including five open-ended questions (see prompts below).
 - Each of 280 responses from the open-ended questions was reviewed.

Survey Prompts:

- What new ideas or perspectives did you discover about teaching and learning as you and your students navigated the digital landscape?
- What new knowledge or skill will you continue to practice when you and your students return to the traditional classroom setting?
- Please describe any observed differential impacts that the transition to the digital classroom had for your students.



- What practices (including teaching strategies and district resources/supports) would you
 recommend to better promote inclusion for ESE and ELL students in the digital learning
 environment?
- What practices (including teaching strategies and district resources/supports) would you
 recommend to better promote engagement of disadvantaged students in the digital learning
 environment?

Data Review / Limitations

Teaching and Learning staff and research investigators explored teacher perceptions of digital learning through methods designed to identify the specific actions of exemplary teachers, not to establish a set of generalizable findings. The invitation of teachers was representative of the variety of schools within the district, though the inquiry did not (by design) involve teachers who were struggling with the transition to a digital platform. Participant responses were reviewed through thematic analysis to identify patterns within the data. These analyses were used in reaching the summary conclusions presented. In keeping with the purpose of the best practices convenings, these findings should be used to support the district's efforts to build capacity and influence professional practice and may be used to triangulate conclusions from related inquiries.







Participant Responses

Identified Successes

Teachers shared how they used Microsoft Teams and a variety of digital resources to adapt their traditional classroom practices for digital learning to include opportunities for student collaboration (small group instruction, discussion boards, individual, and group channels) using multiple platforms (Nearpod, Flipgrid, Kahoot, etc). Teachers also discussed how they adapted lesson delivery to meet the needs of students (pre-recorded lessons, live lessons, lecture notes) and utilized a variety of methods to monitor student learning and provide feedback (focused note-taking, small groups, one-on-one, peer groups). Both students and teachers were described as resourceful and flexible.

Sample Responses

Lessons had to be succinct and laser focused on the standard in order for students to identify, and learn, the "need to know" information of the course.

Live lessons via Teams. Gave me an opportunity to interact with my students in real-time.

Offering the same live lesson @ multiple times of the day and recording the last lesson to be watched by students that couldn't join live. I also have a high turnout for morning meetings every morning where I go over important information for the day.

I feel like incorporating collaboration between students is essential - as we are seeing right now - Nearpod is a great tool for that!

Self-recording lessons to post or holding live lessons. I have been recording read-alouds, instruction for math lessons, debriefing tests in all areas...basically I am recording almost every day. I also record to show students how to find assignments, how to complete them, etc.

I recorded a mini-lesson for release on Sun night / Mon morning. Students were able to view it and then work on assignments/activities. Our live lesson was more of a discussion about the work or opportunity for questions/clarifications.

Using live Q and A sessions to community-build when there were no questions from the students to build buy in for completing work.

Lesson instructions very detailed posted in a Teams announcement AND a screencast video going over lesson details, etc. AND send Focus messenger messages a few times a day with reminders. Varied engaging lesson formats.



Teachers reported that structure and routine were critical components to success when planning lessons for distance learning. Teachers shared that although they adopted some new applications for lesson delivery and collaboration, many said they chose applications students were familiar with to maintain consistency. Student familiarity was deemed important by teachers and helped with participation. Participants reflected on the need for simplicity and efficiency with the number tasks and assignments so as to not overwhelm students while facilitating engagement and checks for understanding. Microsoft Teams, Nearpod, Flipgrid, and reading and math programs accessed through Clever were named as the most widely used software applications.

Sample Responses

Using familiar and easy to access resources was crucial. Keeping assignments, announcements, and live lessons simple and consistent was very important for maximum engagement.

Simple Assignments. I teach Civics. I gave them a reading, video clip and then reflections questions in forms. I did not do a lot of word documents for them to write on. The less destinations, the more engagement I received from the students.

Every week I make a new channel for the week, keeping it more organized with a weekly schedule for the kids for what to do each day.

Repetition of sequence: On Monday, we always do this. On Tuesday, we add on to Monday's lesson by doing this. So on and so forth. I still always provide a Week at a Glance document to remind them, after the first couple weeks, they were comfortable.

Daily Checklists of Expectations has brought a lot of success. Maintaining the same agenda format.

I found a routine that was predictable and consistent for my lowest level students. They were able to do the work independently and feel successful in the class.

I used online formats the students were familiar with, like CommonLit, and built a lesson around text found there with screencast recordings of think alouds and teaching. I also hosted Q and A sessions to help students with misunderstandings, etc.

Keeping things simple and allowing students and parents the opportunity to get comfortable first. Students worked more when they could see me, I recorded myself in lessons and they loved it! Visual is the way to go!

Teachers expressed the need to stay in regular communication with students and families and to remain highly flexible in their expectations regarding deadlines, engagement in live lessons, quality and type of student work products, etc. Teachers reported that they uncovered a deeper understanding, appreciation, and empathy for students and their unique home environments. To increase engagement and maximize learning, teachers reported that a greater degree of individualization of assignments, products, and processes is needed.

Sample Responses

I did a weeklong checklist and made an example schedule for them to use or to adapt.

The increased ability to connect with families is my biggest success.



In class, we used to have a Must Do-May Do day for them to catch up/work independently. We adapted this to digital w/a weekly Must Do-May Do so students could see all the live lessons, posted assignments for the whole week.

Flexibility with types of student work products you accept was key!

One of the most important things I did was to make sure I was delivering the same content in different ways (PowerPoint, Word document, Live lessons). This made it possible for students to engage in the way they could be most successful.

Completely flexible deadlines was the best practice for me because it allowed the students to prioritize their assignments. This relieved a lot of stress for them. Use of IXL platform was super successful because it was something we used already.

Having things delivered in a similar format made it easier for students. Being able to adapt and find new technologies to use to help modify lessons was key. Flexibility for students to respond was key for success. Not every student was able to respond in the same format. Taking answers multiple ways was acceptable.

My students liked having the option to work at their own pace. They liked having all the assignments for the week posted at the beginning of the week, so they could decide when to work on them. The videos and PowerPoints provided the students with a format to review easily, especially for the visual learners.

Differentiation and accommodations can be challenging so we have included a channel for our ESE students to individually interact with us. We have recorded directions and audio text so that the students have the equitable access to content.

I learned that there was nothing more important than my communication with students and families. Keeping them informed through email, which they are used to from me, was key. Also, making sure I kept any levels of stress low in hopes of keeping it low for them too.

Identified Challenges

Teachers largely discussed technology challenges in terms of student capacity to both utilize software and navigate applications. Participants reported that many students lacked basic keyboarding skills and were not always comfortable with saving and sharing documents, using presentation software, emailing, and navigating technology shortcuts.

Sample Responses

Students simply were not familiar with using computers and email. I changed my assignments to help them adapt to online learning. I created videos for how to email and included tons of screenshots in assignment directions.

Many students did not know how to upload word documents and power points. So trying to be tech help for them was difficult.

Students need digital training- cannot assume they are all tech savvy.



I learned that students have knowledge of basic computer programs (games, accessing internet), not useful programs or skills (Word, uploading documents, etc.).

The biggest challenge was the students not having the knowledge of the software. Students did not know how to download and save files. They didn't know how to edit files. They didn't know they had email or access to Office365 through Clever.

Making assignments equitable, and accessible across all forms of technology. I found students using tablets/Ipads struggled the most with the Teams platform.

Some students that I did not expect to do well, embraced digital learning and were very independent learners. Some I thought would do well, really struggled. I was very surprised that they were not more tech savvy.

Teachers reported that many students had difficulty remaining organized and engaged at home, and some became frustrated and unmotivated. This was made more challenging because of the limited personal contact between teacher and student and peer to peer (lack of video options, fewer live lessons, etc.). Teachers responded by providing some strategies to overcome this and lessen its impact on student learning.

Sample Responses

I think it was hard not to see their faces. I did a lot of one-to-one meetings to help as best I could, but this was detrimental to elementary age kids! Some students lost a little interest knowing they couldn't see their friends in class meetings.

When students struggle with assignments they can message me and do an individualized live and we go over and work through their specific questions. Biggest challenge is having students complete work.

Not seeing the student's faces/body language. I never realized how much their non-verbal cues guide my teaching! To help, I created a "private channel" for each kid to contact me and did individually check-ins just to chat/review multiple times a week.

Challenges came up with students who struggled with the material most. For these students, I had them send me screen shots of problems they were struggling with and I created a personal PowerPoint for them that we would go through in a class meeting

By Wednesday students were "disconnected" and not logging in. With the collaboration of the teachers we held "fun Friday chats" where students that completed all their work, could log and chat, send gifs and just be together with their classmates.

Attendance in live lessons/getting kids to watch recordings of live lessons they missed. The lessons would often guide them on how to do assignments. They wouldn't watch and would ask me for help individually. Kept redirecting to the video.

The students are craving more interaction with each other. They want to be able to collaborate. Right now the only interaction they get is in the live lessons. We've played Kahoot and loved it.



Reaching out to students who usually participated actively in class but had disappeared from digital learning. Using Google voice and email to contact them and their parents to offer assistance.

Student mental shut-down once they fall behind. A few would disappear for days and days because they were either discouraged, embarrassed, etc.

The biggest barrier was keeping the students who were really struggling from getting discouraged and giving up. I was able to overcome this by reaching out to these students individually and walking them through the process.

Key Discoveries

Teachers shared that some students who previously struggled in the traditional classroom excelled via distance learning (and vice versa). Success across the digital platforms was varied and any assumptions made about who might struggle and who might not was not consistently evidenced. Teacher participants reflected that students performed across the spectrum, with some struggling or previously undermotivated students thriving in the digital platform while, for others, their struggle was amplified. Teachers also expressed that previously shy or reserved students were move involved and vocal in many cases.

Sample Responses

I had several students that flourished in this environment. They struggled in class but the online schedule clicked something in the brain and they did a great job.

Some of my students who refused to complete assignments in class now have an A. What really surprised me was that it took this long to understand that this is a great learning modality for some middle school students!

Some students who, for some reason, don't perform well in the classroom (academically), are doing an outstanding job in the new environment. Also, the parental involvement has been remarkable in many cases.

The kids who were failing are now soaring, some who were achieving are now dropped off the map, some have stayed the same. The creativity is absolutely amazing of some of the work.

I was surprised that some of my students thrived in the online environment whereas not so much in the classroom. However, I also saw vice-versa. Online learning requires self-discipline, and some of our kids don't have that quite yet.

Some of my "most challenging" students in regard to discipline/behavior have done REALLY REALLY well:)

My lowest performing/behavior students in the classroom became rock stars online.

Concern: Reliable students who dropped off the face of the Earth and I haven't heard from or don't complete work.

I was surprised overall at how many students did not adapt to digital learning. Like many said, we assume because they're on their phones that they would know how to navigate, but that was not the case.



Many students who did not speak up in class found their voice during digital learning.

One good surprise was some of my ADHD kids THRIVED online because they weren't having a class full of distractions and they were able to focus and work one-on-one with me, which is something they don't get a lot of in class.

Students who had a difficult time to focus, attention span, (wanting to leave) have been really successful this grading period! They told me, the classroom is so distracting to them and they can complete work in their own time.

I created a weekly discussion board. It really helped students who are shy or rarely want to participate, finally shine in this setting.

Teachers also reported that student social interaction remains a critical component to learning and that was made more challenging within the digital learning environment. Though students were working from home, both the teachers and students craved a sense of belonging and community and they found that deep, personal connections were more easily formed at school.

Sample Responses

This whole experience showed just how we all have that need for social/emotional interaction in education. Live lessons, Flipgrid, and class chat channels have helped, but that personal connection has been the hardest for my students and for me.

Students need to hear and see each other. If distance learning is to continue - we need to figure out the best way for students to collaborate in real time with each other.

Most students were wanting to see us and each other. They could've done nothing all day but they wanted to log in and do 'something' (if not always everything). We need to give them the core kernels plus the 'face time' and they will take it and run.

How much they really miss school and want to go back. Not just for their friends but they miss the classroom.

I was concerned by how many students messaged about wanting to be back at school. The social emotional impact from this is huge. They have missed their friends, their teachers, their routines, and the environments that they called home for so long.

Obviously the more we used it the easier it became. Teams became like a virtual classroom, as I set up channels to represent aspects of our classroom, shout-outs, compliments, news, Q&A, photo gallery.

Our students are missing the in-person connections more than even the rest of us. I have tried to keep as much of our classroom banter, inside jokes, and personal stories alive in our digital classroom also. The life lasting lesson this transition will (hopefully) teach is immeasurable. Are able to adjust and adapt? Can you fight through a problem? Do you quit when things get hard?



Creative Solutions

Teachers reported a variety of creative methods to engage students, and many expressed an interest in continuing using digital tools to engage students and differentiate learning even when students return to a traditional classroom setting.

Sampling of Solutions offered by Teachers

Creating a "daily" schedule for my students that revolved around a theme seemed to encourage them to show-up each day. I incorporated many art and music activities and students enjoyed sending their pictures to me.

For math, sometimes I would pre-record a short mini-lesson. Then I would schedule a live lesson to have an inquiry-based discussion.

I started each week with a "student menu" which then prompted students with a series of activities and assignments to complete for the week. I also provided a variety of ways for students to submit work. Providing live lesson intervention as needed.

I brought home the Popsicle sticks with the kids names that I use in class to call on them. I pull them during a live lesson just like I would in class.

I created binders of materials to go with online lessons and delivered to door steps.

New ideas I discovered about teaching included ways to promote student engagement. As student interest and engagement began to decline, we introduced new interactive boards to heighten their interest. I created a Virtual Classroom Library and Virtual Science Lab for my students where they were able to click on items in the slide to take them to read-alouds, safe and easy science experiments from home, and much, much more.

I discovered students thrive in small group or one on one instruction. During this time, I've been able to meet with all of my students one on one, without feeling rushed or having to observe 15 other students at the same time. Being that students can access their work at their time and pace, provided opportunities to differentiate instruction and provide immediate feedback.

Lessons that make a connection between the real world and content. Lessons that are meaningful. Choice/UDL lessons.

Adding videos, music, games in the middle of the lesson, posting digital rewards for completion of those students. Assign activities that once completed will leave the students with a sense of accomplishment.

Thinking outside of the box with assignments. Play into student interests when teaching content. Try to focus on using "identity" as your theme to present your content to help student engagement and success. As an art teacher I was able to create activities allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of a particular concept with out needing any art supplies. We did a lot of found object searches and create art from recycled materials.



Meeting students individual needs! I created individual Teacher Chat channels for each student. This is a place where students can ask me questions one-on-one and where I can provide feedback in addition to feedback I give on individual assignments.

I would suggest mailing things to disadvantaged children. Making sure they know that their teacher loves them, misses them and is thinking of them. More check-ins for these families is incredibly important to keep the progress the child has made going.

Software Applications

The participant survey also provided insights into the primary tools that teachers used in executing their digital lessons. Teachers reported that district-supported tools such as Microsoft Teams, Nearpod, and Flipgrid were used extensively and in a variety of ways to engage students.

Sample Responses (top three choices):

Use in your instructional practice:

• Microsoft Teams 45.6% (31); Instructional Resources via Clever 14.7% (10); Nearpod 14.7% (10)

Promoting engaging lessons for students:

Nearpod 26.5% (18); Microsoft Teams 17.7 % (12); Streaming Videos (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.) 16.2% (11)

Enabling students to express their ideas and thoughts on the lesson:

• Microsoft Teams 46.9 % (31); Flipgrid 30.3% (20); Nearpod 10.6% (7)

Utilizing differentiated instruction:

• Microsoft Teams 46.0 % (29); Instructional Resources via Clever 17.5 (11); Nearpod 15.9% (10)

Facilitating student collaboration:

Microsoft Teams 65.2 % (43); Nearpod 10.6% (7); Flipgrid 7.6% (5)

Conclusion / Next Steps

The themes and conclusions provided have been reviewed by the district's Teaching and Learning staff and will inform adjustments to training and support documents specific to best practices in digital instruction. The district's efforts to learn from its most accomplished teachers and leaders is an evolving dialogue that includes professional convenings and related formal and informal methods. This inquiry was successful because of the commitment of the teacher participants. They are to be commended for their professionalism and candor.