

engagement and really setting aside the time to use them properly can result in a world of difference for your student (Fung, Magdeline & Kamei, 2020).

- 3. Leverage student-to-student interaction as much as you can.** When you were able to teach classes in person, you may have used the opportunity to have your students ‘teach each other’ as much as possible through group activities and discussions. It can be easy to think that those days are over, at least for a time, when you have to go remote with your teaching structure. There are a few different ways that you can do this with remote classroom software. For example, you could divide your students up into teams - and assign each team a specific chatroom, that only they (and you) can see. Pose a question to your classroom, and hold a competition to see which team can come up with a solution first. Some nominal treat to the winning team can make this more interesting to school-age children (Fung, Magdeline & Kamei, 2020).

Aside from this general three-pronged approach, there are other hacks and tips that can make remote learning much more effective and easy, including ones that we have covered above. However, one incredibly efficient way to invest in your student’s learning experience is to ensure that your students’ parents know how best to support their education.

Helping Your Student’s Parents Understand How to Help Their Children

When it comes to helping your students, particularly those who are younger children, it is an inescapable truth that you need to help their parents. After all, even in a regular learning scenario, parents are pivotal players in helping with academics: Making sure children get their homework done, helping with more involved school projects, and answering simple questions if they’re able, among other actions.

When we turn to remote learning, the level to which parents must be involved becomes even more pronounced. Their children may not have familiarity with technological devices or video-chatting platforms prior to beginning remote learning. Your children’s parents will need to assist with a good audio-video environment at home. The parents will be the ones on-site with your children to help remind them that remote learning is worth their time and attention. In many ways, it could feel like the roles are reversed from a normal in-classroom learning experience.

Your parents might be very vocal about how remote learning should go. They might have very specific ideas that you don’t have the ability to implement. They could also be very busy with commitments of their own during school hours. Whatever the status is, in

order for remote learning to go successfully, you need to harness the enthusiasm of the parents to a productive end. Here, we'll list out a few ideas for doing just that.

Start by, if possible, identifying the virtual equivalent of parental volunteer positions. Some parents may be working. Others may have time to give. Some schools use parental advisory committees to help school administrators meet the needs of their students. In remote learning, the technical and very practical needs of the students skyrocket - so now, more than ever, this type of go-between support is needed. If you're able to form parent advisory committees comprised of the guardians of children in your class or school, you can ask them to do the following (while surveying anonymously or managing online discussion rooms):

- Gather feedback on the ways children and parents experience virtual learning
- Identify specific pain points and frustrations regarding virtual learning
- Put together recommendations from these conversations to bring to school teachers and administrators
- Target specific information from select student groups, such as students with special needs who are learning remotely, or students who speak English as a second language
- Disseminate information from the school that might otherwise get lost in a crowded email inbox, such as school deadlines and opening dates, updates to school policies, or posts that the school has issued on social media (Liu, 2020).

Ask these parent volunteers to lead virtual classroom activities from time to time. Prior to going remote, you might have done this occasionally - asking parents to come in and speak about their jobs, guide the students in a simple exercise, tell stories, or speak to their specific experiences. By doing this, you'll vary your student's lecturing experience, which will lead to heightened interest and engagement. You'll also get a few minutes to take a break from presenting yourself, during which you can take time to understand the student experience of remote learning or check-in with your students. Doing so could be easy: simply add the parent in through a video conference call. If the parent doesn't specifically want to present, the parent can also simply monitor students through a video conferencing platform while the students watch an informational video (such as an educational documentary or a virtual tour of a museum that you may be streaming). After this experience, parents can facilitate a discussion of what occurred. Involving parents in this way will help your student's parents feel overall more positively about

how remote learning is going simply because it's their project, too - and it'll make your students more excited to tune in, as they see increasingly familiar faces pop up on their screens (Liu, 2020).

Ask parents who have experience with your subject to serve as tutors for your students. If you know that a specific parent has an interest or a familiarity with your subject, ask them if they'd be willing to participate in a homework hotline or a virtual tutoring arrangement. This could be as simple as having them set aside an hour of their time to be available to students for questions, or the parent volunteer could be paired with specific students who may be struggling for more one-on-one support. If it's an option, you could provide this parent tutor with materials relating to your students' homework in advance so they could familiarize themselves with the content and facilitate student understanding from a different perspective than you may be able to offer (Liu, 2020).

Ask parents who understand and celebrate the remote learning format to hold their own office hours for other parents. As we covered above, parents of students learning remotely need support so they can adequately help their children. Motivated parent volunteers can host informal parent support meetings to talk about the best ways they've found to support their children (such as, for example, creating at-home routines and building a supportive virtual learning environment), and this could be a great way to encourage and involve parents. Creating a volunteer troubleshooting hotline could be a good idea, too, so parents can help each other solve any remote learning problems as close to real-time as possible (Liu, 2020).

If the parents of students at your school are pushing for specific remote learning policies, see if you can channel that enthusiasm into support that you can work with. Any of the above ideas are not only great to get parents more involved in their students' educational experience, but are also a surefire way to ensure that your students have the environment they need to be more engaged in their studies.

How to Help Your Students Find Ways to Socialize Remotely

Student socialization is an important part of the school experience - and often one which yields significant benefits for overall student engagement. Think back to your own school experience: It's likely that, in at least some part, the fact that you were able to discuss your subjects with your classmates contributed to your overall depth of learning.

Sometimes, those student-student connections happen organically, outside of the classroom. Other times, young children need a little bit of help figuring out how to create friendships with their peers. As school (and, traditionally, brick-and-mortar

classroom activities) is such an ingrained part of young student socialization, families may correctly wonder how their students are to receive the same benefits if current events dictate that school be taught remotely.

After all, many of the working mechanisms we already have in place for remote learning prioritize the main connection that defines education: Those between the student and the teacher. However, as we mentioned earlier, often, student engagement is just as much a function of the entire classroom experience as it is the relationship between each individual student and the instructor (Nikolajski, 2020).

The teacher who realizes this, and, in an emergency or routine remote learning scenario, takes steps to strengthen the student-student bonds and overall student experience in the remote classroom, can hope to benefit from these actions. To round out this course on student engagement, we'll take a look at ways to help students find ways to socialize when remote learning (and remote socialization) constitutes the new normal.

- Set up a remote dance, stretching, or cardio class for your students. If your students are at home, they may need help getting normal fitness levels into their daily routine; and, whether through recess, gym classes, or athletic teams, your students may already be used to working out together (Nikolajski, 2020).
- Conduct remote challenges and competitions. Have your students run a mile remotely, and compare their times to each other; host a trivia night, and encourage different teams of students to converse semi-privately in their own chat rooms (monitored by yourself or a parent volunteer) (Nikolajski, 2020).
- Host virtual game sessions. Technology has made it possible to play many games online (Nikolajski, 2020).

Ultimately, anyway that you can take your students' minds off the stress of current events and back to strengthening their relationship with each other (and having fun), the more you'll be able to provide them with a healthy mental re-set - and the more you'll be able to strengthen the backbone of your classroom, even if it's a virtual one. When your students feel that they aren't alone, even as they're sitting at home in front of a computer, they'll be more excited about tuning in. If they can remember that they're part of a close-knit learning community, they'll more naturally want to join in the conversation - and you can be a big part of making that happen.

Conclusion

As a teacher, you want what's best for your students. You want to find ways to teach them effectively; you want them to enjoy the time they spend in your classroom.

Sometimes, this comes naturally. Other times, this type of engagement can present a bit of a challenge.

When you're trying to find ways to increase student engagement in your classroom (in-person or virtual), it can be tough to know where to start. Following the research, spending time working on your classroom organization and student socialization techniques, and really prioritizing your emotional connection with your students can work wonders in this way.

The research also tells us one thing: Even if student engagement is difficult to define or measure in quantitative ways, it can be simple to tell when students are happy, productive, participating, and thriving. Increasing efforts toward student engagement seems to help towards those ends. When looking for ways to increase student engagement, finding ways to invest in your community, invest in your relationships, and be flexible about your teaching structure can go a very long way towards success.

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