

Promising Practices Newsletter

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The proposal submission system is now open for the 2021 Making Schools Work Conference at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, July 6-9.

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Teaching and Learning During a Health Crisis

By Diane James, SREB

In person, virtual or blended learning. Schools are reopening this fall in a variety of ways due to the havoc wreaked by the once-in-a-century COVID-19 pandemic. The reopening model that schools and districts select is often based on the impact of the virus in each district and parents', teachers' and students' comfort level in returning safely to the classroom.

Last March when schools across the country were abruptly shuttered due to a federal mandate to slow the spread of the virus, school districts had to scramble to figure out how to continue teaching and learning. The solution — virtual learning.

Platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom were used to form the new virtual classroom. Teachers' experiences working in a 100% virtual environment varied widely. SREB asked educators to share their experiences and explain how it will influence how they move forward this fall.

Donna Van Metre

Director/Principal,
James Rumsey Technical Institute
Martinsburg, West Virginia

Background. James Rumsey Technical Institute serves about 600 students annually — 120 adults and 480 students from three counties. The center is in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia about 75 minutes from Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, but also serves students in rural areas.



James Rumsey Technical Institute, West Virginia

Online-Only Learning. Many teachers had no formal training in remote learning when schools closed. "The word Zoom was not in our vocabulary," says Van Metre, but it became a powerful teaching and learning tool that teachers quickly learned to use.

"We kind of got a curve ball, too. Two weeks after the shift to remote learning, the state said whatever grade students had at the end of the nine weeks would be their semester grade," indicated Van Metre.

Although teachers provided online instruction until the end of the school year, students didn't have to participate. "We had some students who hung in until the very end and some just disappeared the instant the decision was made," Van Metre says — resulting in students missing out on a lot of instruction.

Video Greetings



Find Your Focus:
A Welcome to the
2020-21 School Year

Stephen Pruitt,
President of
the Southern Regional
Education Board



Good Wishes for the
2020-21 School Year

Dale Winkler, SREB
Vice President of
School Improvement

Biggest Challenges. As a tech center, “We faced a challenge with the hands-on element of teaching,” says Van Metre. Some teachers sent home equipment for students’ hands-on learning experiences, but others, like welding teachers, weren’t able to do that. “The nature of our program is that we need to be with the kids to know if they can work safely,” insists Van Metre. She also expressed frustration that some students still haven’t taken their industry certification exams. “The reason many students come to the center is to get those certifications,” she states.

Internet access was also a problem for students in rural areas. To address it, the tech center set up hotspots in its parking lots, but students had to provide their own transportation to the center and then do class work in their cars.

Biggest Rewards. “We are looking at education in a different way. There’s a realization that schools are doing a lot more than just providing instruction,” Van Metre says about the social and emotional support students get from schools and the meals

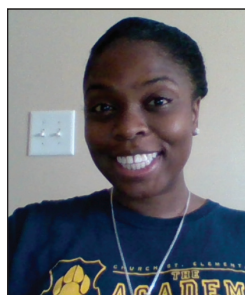
schools provide. She notes Berkeley County has provided more than 450,000 meals to students since school closed.

“We are also looking at instructional delivery in a different way,” Van Metre muses. She deduces that virtual learning has eliminated the need for schools to close — for example, during snow days. Plus, there’s no need for students to miss a day’s instruction due to a doctor’s appointment. That’s because teachers not only provide instruction remotely, they are also recording their lessons so that students may review them at any time.

Looking Toward Fall. The district is tentatively set to begin face-to-face learning in September, but Van Metre says teachers will be prepared to quickly transition to virtual learning if needed. “We’re thinking outside the box about how to serve our students.” Some teachers are looking at simulators for classroom instruction; some are creating instructional kits and developing lessons around modules that may be sent to students’ homes. In the fall, counties in the sending-school districts have been tasked with setting up remote hotspots for internet access.



Laquana Cardwell’s Parent Meet and Greet Bitmoji Classroom



Laquana Cardwell

Laquana Cardwell

Fifth-grade teacher,
Church Street Elementary School
Riverdale, Georgia

Background. Church Street Elementary School is a Title I school located about 15 minutes south of Atlanta — it serves nearly 1,000 students in grades Pre-K through five.

In 2019-20, Laquana Cardwell taught students with a wide range of learning abilities and disabilities, which required her to differentiate instruction on many levels.

Sudden Shift to Online-Only Learning. “It was like putting someone in a cold pool. You were thrown in and it was a shock, but over time, your body adjusted,” says Cardwell. She describes technology-only learning as difficult at times, but she readily admits the district already used a wealth of technology including a 1-to-1 laptop program and various learning platforms, such as Google Classroom, that made remote learning easier to navigate.

In the beginning of the shutdown, Cardwell used Zoom for virtual instruction. It allowed her to meet in whole-class gatherings and set up breakout rooms to meet with students in small ability-based groups. But due to well-publicized hacking issues with Zoom, the school switched to Google Meet, a video-communication platform the district already had in place. Cardwell says it allowed her to continue whole-class instruction but did not facilitate the student grouping that she enjoyed with Zoom.

Biggest Challenges. Cardwell notes, “Technology was the largest challenge.” Students often had problems with connectivity issues and logging into Google Meet. “When you’re in the classroom, you can go to each student and help them technology-wise.” She adds, “It’s more difficult to troubleshoot and talk them through it in an online setting.”

Families having too few laptops in the home was an issue — or even if all siblings had laptops, connectivity problems crept up because they all needed to be online at the same time. The district addressed this issue by limiting the number of hours students were required to be online with their teachers and requiring teachers to record their lessons so students could view them later.

Cardwell indicates distance learning highlighted the pitfalls of not having the in-person teacher-student relationship. Teachers’ ability to gauge students’ social and emotional well-being was limited.

“In an online platform, we can’t see when a student comes in with a bruise. We can’t see the look on their faces to know that something is going on emotionally,” says Cardwell. To help identify hardships, Cardwell has an SEL check-in with students every day before lessons begin. Through Google Classroom, she prompts them to write in a journal how they are doing — whether they’re excited or sad — just to share how they are feeling emotionally. She reads over the journal entries and sometimes asks the students if they want to talk. “If a child is dealing with a lot of things at home, it’s going to be difficult to get their attention and maintain their attention during instruction.”

Biggest Rewards. “Students who once said, ‘I don’t want to go to school’ were now missing being in school,” Cardwell exclaims. “That in itself changed the dynamic of our learning environment,” and students were more eager to interact and participate, she adds.

Looking Toward Fall. Over the summer, the district and teachers have spent time finding new technology and ways to move forward in a virtual learning environment. Some teachers are using the Bitmoji app to create their avatars and build an inviting virtual classroom. The interactive elements allow students to click through to see assignments.



Heather Pitzer, Delaware Area Career Center, Ohio

Heather Pitzer

English teacher,
Delaware Area Career Center
Delaware, Ohio

Background. Delaware Area Career Center is in a suburban community north of Columbus, Ohio, and serves about 1,000 students from 11 sending high schools in six districts. About 300 of those students attend the center full time for their technical labs and required academic classes. Pitzer teaches English to 10th, 11th and 12th graders.

Sudden Shift to Online-Only Learning. Students on the academic side already had a “leg up” on remote learning, says Pitzer. The center had a 1-to-1 computer program and was already implementing some form of blended learning with teachers using Google Classrooms or Blackboard. Students who were in good standing academically and behaviorally could take part in a hybrid credit program in which they participated in academic classwork online each Friday. This freed up students for internships or extra work in their CTE labs.

Biggest Challenges. Pitzer notes things got a little dicey when teachers switched to Microsoft Teams for virtual learning. The teachers were up to speed, but “the kids had no experience with it, and we had to teach it on the fly,” she maintains. Students had to become comfortable with features like requesting video conferencing with teachers or coming to office hours.

Pitzer cites student-teacher relationships as another challenge. “When you walk into a classroom, you could see when your students were upset or know what’s going on and have those side conversations with them.” Maintaining those relationships is difficult online.

Before the shutdown, Pitzer indicates she ran a discussion-driven classroom, but with online learning she believes deep-dive thinking and discussions were lacking.

Biggest Rewards. “It was really cool that my students got to see me being a mom,” says Pitzer as she explained how her own kids would sometimes walk into the room as she was teaching. She also got to see students’ parents on the computer monitor as they helped their children with schoolwork. “That sense of community that happened was really cool.”

Looking Toward Fall. Pitzer says she’s apprehensive about building relationships with new students as the fall term begins. When schools closed in March, students already knew who she was, what her expectations were and that they could come to her for help. “I’m worried about how that’s going to translate when I’m just a person behind the screen,” she says in dismay.

Concluding Thoughts

Teachers worry a lot about their students’ well-being, but our interviewees all emphasize that teachers must also take care of themselves. As Van Metre notes, “My teachers need to be emotionally healthy. If they’re not healthy, nobody is learning.” Cardwell agrees, “We [teachers] have to do SEL and check-in for ourselves to make sure we’re 100% for our students.”

Need Support With Online, Blended and Hybrid Instruction?

By Kirsten Sundell and Jahana Martin, SREB

COVID-19 radically changed how teachers teach and students learn. When school buildings closed in March, educators were forced to quickly pivot how they delivered instruction. With so much uncertainty as the new school year begins, educators need support to deliver content in any format — face-to-face, online or in a blended setting.

To help teachers adapt their content for any format, SREB created a new national workshop, [Engaging Students in a Blended Instructional World](#). Over five days, each 2.5-hour session focused on a different topic to help educators transition to teaching virtually.

Participants liked being able to view activities from both student and teacher perspectives. Educators learned how to plan for virtual instruction and identify best practices while gaining hands-on experience using features like chats, Q&As, surveys, whiteboards, breakout rooms and more.

“This series has really given me the chance to learn more about teaching virtually. It has given me so many resources and different ideas on what to do with my students. I look forward to planning and engaging with my students,” said one participant.

Synchronous or Asynchronous—THAT is the Question...

Synchronous	Asynchronous
Students learn at the same time.	Students learn at different times.
Communication happens in real time.	Communication is not live.
Possibly more engaging and effective.	Possibly more convenient and flexible.
Allows for instant feedback and clarification.	Allows students to work at their own pace.
Examples Video conferencing, live chat, live-streamed videos.	Examples Email, screencasts, Flipgrid videos, blog posts/comments.

Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Instruction: A Clip from SREB's July 2020 Blended Instruction Workshops

Based on the success of our blended instruction workshops and free introductions to virtual learning, we're launching a **new series of deep-dive, multi-session workshops** on innovative virtual instruction strategies for literacy, math, project-based learning, CTE, scaffolding instruction and supporting students' social-emotional needs. Workshops start mid-September and cost only \$250. **Learn more and register now for one or more workshops:** sreb.org/virtual_workshops



SREB's K-12 Education Recovery Task Force

By Kirsten Sundell, SREB

In March, as the COVID-19 pandemic grew, SREB reached out to states and districts across the South to listen to their concerns and offer support. Out of those conversations grew the [K-12 Education Recovery Task Force](#), a coalition of [nearly 50 leaders and teachers](#) from SREB states.

The Task Force began meeting weekly in April to set priorities for helping schools and districts develop reopening plans. By mid-July, Task Force members and SREB staff created the [K-12 Education Recovery Playbook](#), which provides actions, tools and templates districts and schools can use to:

- [Address funding, scheduling and technology needs](#)
- [Protect the health and safety of students and staff](#)
- [Promote new learning, scaffold lost learning](#) and [support students with exceptional needs](#)

Three Takeaways

Student and staff well-being. Task Force members' greatest concern is ensuring the health and safety of students and staff when schools reopen.

On the operations side, districts have acted quickly to [secure cleaning supplies](#) and personal protective equipment and [design plans](#) to socially distance students and staff on buses, in the classroom and in shared spaces.

“Take care of the immediate needs of people first. Help with their basic needs before you address academic needs.”

— Doris Voitier,
Superintendent, St. Bernard
Parish Schools, Louisiana

With so much class time lost this spring, educators may feel pressure to [catch students up](#). But returning students may have experienced neglect, abuse, food scarcity, the death or illness of loved ones, or loss of income in their families. Students do best when schools address students' [physical](#) and [mental health](#) first.

Schools can launch the new year by offering [back-to-school events](#) that reconnect students, parents and staff and provide ongoing activities that cultivate [social-emotional development](#).

Access to devices and the internet. When schools closed, teachers, students and parents had to pivot quickly to remote learning — often without the tools, internet or training they needed. COVID-19 has magnified deep inequities in [access to the 1:1 devices and internet](#) teachers, students and parents need to teach and learn online when schools reopen this fall. Task Force members urge districts to help families access [district-provided or personal 1:1 devices](#), locate [free or low-cost internet or Wi-Fi](#), and [receive training](#) on the tools, apps and platforms students use.

Accelerating learning for each child. Most teachers and students spent the spring reviewing old content. Districts lowered their expectations for participation and scrambled to find new ways to extend services to special needs students, only to fall short of reaching many in need.

SREB's Playbook includes advice on how schools can use [diagnostic assessments](#) to identify learning gaps, [adapt curricula to scaffold lost learning](#), [design online, blended or hybrid instruction](#), [deliver tiered interventions](#), [support students with special needs](#), [accelerate learning for advanced students](#), and ensure students and teachers can [access technology](#).

SREB's Scott Warren, division director of Making Schools Work, recently shared six steps to improve instruction in blended, hybrid or in-person settings. Here are highlights:

1. **Shift attitudes.** Make teaching and learning *new* content a must. Set clear expectations for participation and mastery and share those expectations in frequent communications.

2. **Teach the technology.** Plan lessons that show students and parents how to use edtech tools. [Create and share instructional videos](#) on school websites and social media.
3. **Use a common platform.** Choose a districtwide [learning management system](#) or platform to reduce the number of sites and passwords students and parents must use.
4. **Adapt your curriculum.** Examine the curriculum for opportunities to revisit past content and provide just-in-time interventions. Identify what must be taught in-person versus online.
5. **Provide professional learning.** Provide time for teachers to collaborate with peers and receive the [ongoing training](#) they need to use [edtech tools](#) and adapt their instruction.
6. **Embrace innovation.** Use [open educational resources](#) to facilitate lab-based or fine arts classes and [CTE programs](#). Allow teacher teams to divide the work of creating in-person and online lessons and offering whole- and small-group instruction.

Learn More in Our Blogs

SREB staff have written many blogs on teaching and learning during COVID-19. Here are a few:

- [Virtual labs for STEM and CTE](#)
- [Navigating online learning](#)
- [Online professional learning support](#)
- [Distance learning for rural schools](#)
- [Tech center supports for health care workers](#)
- [Quality learning for elementary students](#)
- [“Wireless on wheels”](#) and [other tech solutions](#)
- [Promoting student collaboration in any setting](#)
- [A new approach to blended instruction](#)

Advanced Career Goes Online!



Socially distanced teachers are working on projects at Advanced Career's STTIs.

SREB's AC team shifted our Summer Teacher Training Institutes to a virtual platform this year! Live online training sessions and offline activities in June and July introduced dozens of new and veteran AC teachers to the first few projects in their AC curricula and tackled the principles of effective project-based learning and scaffolding skills for struggling students. This fall, AC teachers will continue to explore the remaining projects in their courses

and work with peers to complete a scope and sequence and share strategies for supporting special needs students.

Want to learn more? Watch our new introduction to Advanced Career — part of a comprehensive new video series produced in partnership with Teaching Channel — to explore how AC helps teachers empower students to build the strong academic, technical and workplace skills needed by professionals in highly paid STEM fields.



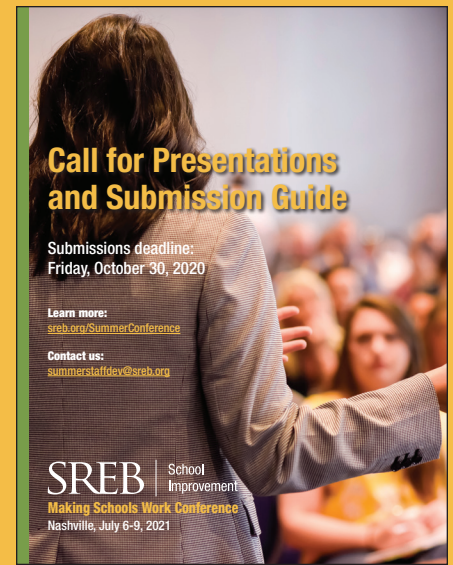
Advanced Career Overview Video

We're Setting the Stage for You! Present With Us in Nashville

Share your strategies, struggles and success stories with us in Nashville. The proposal submission system is now open for the [2021 Making Schools Work Conference](#) at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, July 6-9.

New content areas this year include offering online, blended and hybrid instruction and supporting students and families in the era of COVID-19. Join us and gain the tools and confidence you need to impact teaching and learning in any setting.

Visit our website to explore [guidance for presenters](#), download our [submission guide](#) and get ready to submit a successful proposal. The submission system will close on or before October 30, 2020.



Pacesetter School Award Winners

By Jahana Martin, SREB

In June, SREB announced winners of the 2020 Gene Bottoms Pacesetter School Awards and State and District Leadership awards. Twenty-three schools were recognized for implementing one of SREB's Making Schools Work school improvement frameworks and achieving success in meeting bold goals related to increases in student graduation rates, readiness for college and careers, and credential attainment.

SREB's State Leadership and District Leadership Awards recognize a state and a district that have established continuous improvement structures and processes that help schools transform their school and classroom practices, establish and sustain change, and increase student achievement.

Recipients will be honored on July 6, 2021, at SREB's Making Schools Work Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, due to the cancellation of the 2020 conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

- Asbury High School
- Bethel-Tate Middle School
- Choffin Career and Technical Center
- Deer Park Junior/Senior High School
- DeKalb County Technology Center
- Easley High School
- Excelsior Springs Area Career Center
- Gordon Cooper Technology Center
- Harding Middle School
- Hueytown High School
- Indian Valley High School
- Mahoning County Career & Technical Center
- Mid-America Technology Center
- Moore High School
- Nicholas County Career and Technical Center
- Northland Career Center
- Penta Career Center
- Pickens County Career & Technology Center
- Riverside Academy
- Springboro High School
- Sumter Career and Technology Center
- Whale Branch Early College High School
- Williamsburg High School
- Mississippi's State Leadership Award
- DeKalb County, Alabama's District Leadership Award



2021 Making Schools Work Conference

GAYLORD OPRYLAND RESORT & CONVENTION CENTER
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE | JULY 6-9, 2021



Pedro Noguera

*UCLA Graduate School
of Education and
Information Studies*

Keynote Speaker —
Opening General Session

2:30 p.m., Tuesday,
July 6, 2021



Anna Nixon

Co-Founder, STEM4Girls
Keynote Speaker —
Closing General Session

3 p.m., Thursday,
July 8, 2021

SREB

School
Improvement

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AUGUST 2020