Designing a Virtual Learning Program for Elementary Learners

Q-Up for Digital Quality

September 23, 2022

Introductions

Jean Sharp

- More than 30 years of executive leadership and management experience in the education and software publishing industry

- Led content development and instructional design teams in the creation of digital learning solutions that meet the learning needs of our K-12 students and educators today.

- For the past ten years, served as the Chief Academic Officer and Vice President of Content Development at Apex Learning.

- Today, engage with organizations to improve the learning and life outcomes for all students.

- Serve on the Executive Committee for the Digital Learning Collaborative. the Curriculum Advisory Council for Navigate 360, and the Curriculum Advisory Team for D2L.

Reconnecting…

- Look at your keyboard.

- Select a key that best describes how you are feeling today.

- Post your comment in the Chat Box.
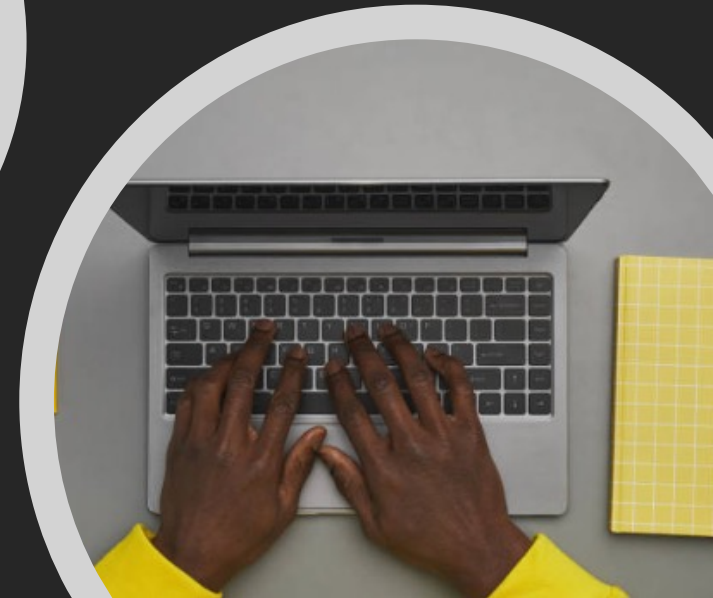
Our Focus Today

While Virtual learning for K-5 students is new to so many stakeholders including teachers, students, families and district partners, one thing is clear---Virtual Learning for K-5 is not brick and mortar on the computer.

Agenda

We'll share the insights and impacts from K-5:

- Why do families choose Virtual Learning for their elementary students and what do teachers need to consider when serving the needs of our youngest students?

- What are the key tenants that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

- What advice and best practices do elementary teachers share for program and student success in Virtual Learning?

Expectations

This session is informed by research and interviews with elementary teachers in a K-5 virtual program. I
- It is intended to seed ideas and spark thinking about what works
- It is intended to be practical.
- It is intended to offer support as you navigate a new school year.

Outcomes Desired

Virtual learning models for the elementary grades are informed by best practices at the classroom and school level but continue to evolve, change, and grow as we learn more about what works.

Why do parents choose virtual learning for their elementary-aged children?

Flexibility

Many families are finding that virtual learning has benefits that fit the needs of their school-age children and their family.

Rigorous Curriculum

Many families want a curriculum that supports as well as challenges their student and offers visibility to student progress and pacing.

Personalized Learning

Many families support the ability to customize learning pathways that meet the individual student learning needs. Personalized learning meets students where they are and encourages them to accelerate learning outcomes.

Health and Safety

While COVID played a role in their initial choice for virtual learning, the physical, emotional, and mental health needs of their children, along with school safety issues are contributing to families ongoing choice.

What do teachers need to consider as they engage elementary students in Virtual Learning?

Learning Guides

Particularly in K-2, an adult needs to serve as a learning guide to provide help and support to the student when they are navigating the platform and learning new content.

Adults in the "Classroom"

Teachers must get accustomed to having adults who serve as learning guides (parent, grandparents, caregivers) in their live lessons and intervention lessons every day.

Teaching the Family

In elementary, teachers are not just teaching students, they are teaching the family. They need to understand the platform and programs in order to support the student.

Building Connection

Frequent and intentional communication builds that connection with families as partners.

Reflecting:
Your Turn

Let's take a moment to reflect on this topic.

You can use the Chat or raise you hand to share your thoughts and experiences on these questions.

Parent Choice

Why are parents in your district or program choosing virtual learning for their elementary-aged children?

Teaching the Family

What did your teachers need to consider as they engaged elementary students in Virtual Learning?

What are the five key tenants +1 that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

1   Intentional Design

Virtual learning requires intentional decisions about program design, instructional practices, and policies that support student success.
Every aspect of the program is designed with intentionality.

The program considers not only what is developmentally appropriate for the students they are serving in an elementary program, but the need to encourage social interaction, build relationships, and ensure that student's individual learning needs are being meet.

Both synchronous and asynchronous learning is incorporated into the learning day, giving students opportunities for whole class direct instruction, intervention and help with assignments as they build confidence as independent learners.

What are the five key tenants +1 that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

2 Culture and Climate

There is a shared vision, with a clarity of purpose, clear expectations, and processes and procedures in place to build a culture committed to supporting student learning at every step of the way.

Student learning is the focus of the program, including a rigorous curriculum designed to help students master grade level skills and competencies.
- Knowing that there is a range of readiness for learning, the program provides supports and scaffolding that meet students where they are.
- Multiple opportunities are available for students to work in small groups or one-on-one with teachers, to get support through interventions, live lessons, or live help.
- Enrichment is also available for students to explore areas of interest.

Key performance indicators include ongoing monitoring of student progress and performance....what they are doing and how they are doing...as they work toward grade level goals.

What are the five key tenants +1 that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

3 Voice and Choice

Give students and their families voice and choice in their learning to access curriculum and demonstrate mastery of grade level skills and competencies

When students have voice and choice, they are more engaged in their own learning.
- Data from the entire population of elementary students during the 2020-21 indicated that the students enrolled in this program completed their coursework – AND – did so with high levels of academic success – with median course completion in every subject above 90%, and overall median grades of 91.7%.

Synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities can support whole class or direct instruction, small groups for intervention and help, and independent assignments that build students' confidence as learners.

What are the five key tenants +1 that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

4 Nurturing Relationships

Elementary teachers are intentional about building relationships with students and their families that support academics, social and emotional well-being, social interaction, and soft skills needed for success in school and life.

The communication with families must be very intentional.
- Bi-weekly family meetings provide opportunities to review student's progress and pacing.
- Sharing "glows and grows"---what the student is doing well and what they need to continue to work on.

These conversations build that connection with families as partners.

Find ways to connect with your students about what they are learning, but also just as people. It is important to feed them academically and feed them emotionally. We can laugh and we can connect across the screen.

What are the five key tenants +1 that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

5 Families as Partners in the Learning Process

Place priority on clear, ongoing, and specific communication to review student progress and pacing. Build connections with families

Particularly in K-2, parents, family members, or caregivers are partners in the learning process. They serve as learning guides to provide immediate help to the student in navigating the technology environment and answering student questions as they engaged with the lesson. That means teachers are not just teaching children, they are teaching families.

Learning guides regularly sit in on live lessons and intervention lessons.
- Teachers must expect that parents, grandparents, and caregivers are attending class with their student(s).

What are the five key tenants +1 that support high quality Virtual Learning in the elementary grades?

+1 Equipping & Supporting Staff

Teachers desire flexibility, support, and satisfaction in their job. Build a culture of sharing and collaboration, along with multiple layers of support including onboarding, mentoring, and professional development that builds their capacity in a virtual environment.

Teachers must have more "protected instructional time" in order to spend more time doing the things that have direct impact on student learning---relationship building, differentiating instruction, providing support and scaffolding as opposed to the non-instructional time in a brick and mortar environment.

Teachers thrive in an environment where leadership listens to and seeks their input. They describe a spirit of professionalism that has reignited their passion for teaching and learning, which may contribute to teacher retention in education.

Reflecting: Your Turn

Let's take a moment to reflect on this topic.

You can use the Chat or raise you hand to share your thoughts and experiences on these questions.

Reflected in Your Program

How are these key tenants of quality virtual learning reflected in your program?

What else is part of your framework?

To build a high-quality sustainable virtual learning program for elementary learners, what else should be part of our framework?

What advice and best practices do elementary teachers share for program and student success in Virtual Learning?

I call the other teachers my learning family. We were put in a situation where everything was new for a lot of us. But everyone comes to the table together to solve problems. And we're all learning and helping each other.

We must be intentional in our decisions to ensure we build school around the needs of every student and give them pathways to success.

You have to create a culture and a climate where it's alright to give the wrong answer. The minute we tell a kid that's the wrong answer, they're never going to raise their hand again. So, the intentional focus is the risk-free learning environment. If you fall, we have a safety net over here.

What advice and best practices do elementary teachers share for program and student success in Virtual Learning?

Caregivers of children enrolled in a K–5 virtual learning program are as much a part of the teaching and learning equation as anyone.

"Students have to know that I care whether or not they're successful. So, making sure they know that you are there as the teacher and you're not just someone on the computer that's grading their work. That comes with building those relationships and connections. So, number one, they have to know that there is someone who cares about their success."

A program leader was asked what their youngest students like best about virtual learning. Her answer was simple---their teacher.
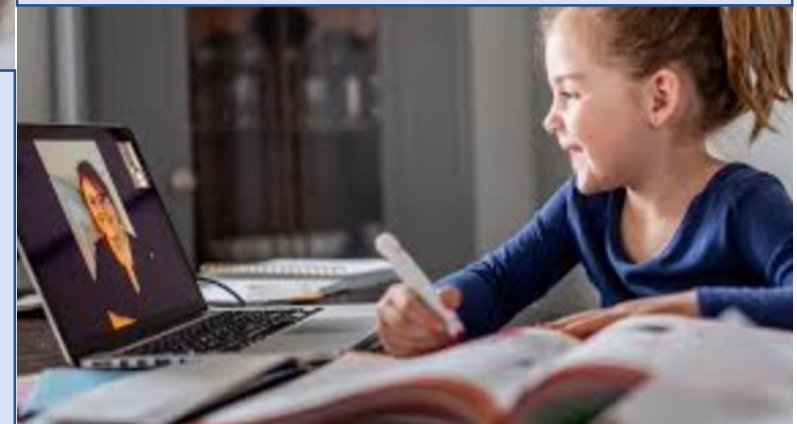
In Closing…

- Explore questions,
- Reflect on your key takeaway, and
- Share a final word

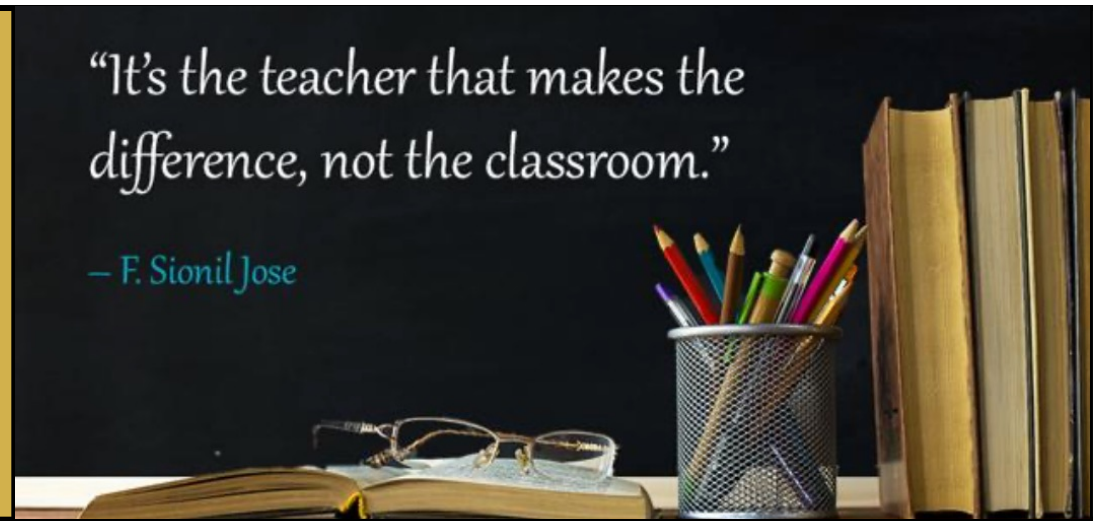|	
Further Questions	If you have questions you'd like to explore, feel free to enter them in the Chat. We will address as many questions as time permits.
Reflect	Reflect on your key takeaway from our conversation.
A Final Word	"It's the teacher that makes the difference, not the classroom." — F. Sionil Jose

Thank you

Jean.SharpSolutionsServicesGroup@outlook.com
https://www.linkedin.com/in/jean-sharp-913a355/