

## **JFYNet Podcast – MAY 2020, Teachers transition to distance learning.**

**GREG:** *Today's podcast features educators from Durfee High School in Fall River, Mindess Elementary School in Ashland, and Newton South High School as they discuss how the move to online learning due to the statewide school shutdown has impacted their daily schedules...*

**MRS. HONEYMAN:** There's a weekly schedule, and each teacher has an hour set aside for office hours for each of their courses. Then we also have two days, Thursday and Friday, that have 1/2-hour class meeting time...

**GREG:** *...allowed some of their students to thrive...*

**MRS. SILVA:** What I like about it, I've had some really great conversations with them through Google Classroom. Like even just leaving messages back and forth to each other...

**GREG:** *...and how the Covid 19 virus may create a new normal for educators and students in the fall...*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** I know that they would love to get back to our business as usual. But I think there are definitely challenges that we will struggle with, especially with such a large population of students...

**GREG:** *This Podcast was created by JFYNetWorks, a Boston based nonprofit provider of remote learning programs to schools, students, and parents. JFY's individualized, self-paced curricula help raise individual and school performance measures by maintaining grade level skills and combating learning loss. JFY provides online ELA and math curricula aligned to state and college standards from grade six through high school, with personal support online and via phone from friendly instructional coaches like yours truly. For JFYNetWorks, I'm GREG Cunningham.*

*Rachel Silva is an English teacher at Durfee High School in Fall River. When the Fall River schools shut down in March, the school system instituted a three-phase approach to distance learning.*

**MRS. SILVA:** So, for our online learning. Each grade level has a different type of work assigned to them. Right now, we're in phase three. So, let me start there. So, we actually had three phases of work for the kids since we left. We started, of course, with Phase one, and that was work that we gave them while we were still in the building that last few days or so on the Friday and on the Monday and they were able to get personalized work, assigned from their main teacher. That's how we did Phase one. What they were supposed to do then, was, if we had a Google classroom, they could submit it through Google classroom, or they could take pictures of it. Send it to us any way they possibly could.

After phase one, they realized that something else had to be done. There had to be something a little more concrete. And each teacher needed to kind of be on the same page because we found out that some teachers were over assigning and some under assigning. So, what the school, the common decided was that they formed a committee for elementary, you know, through 12th grade, and each section had was in charge of coming up with an assignment for their group.

So, freshman through senior got the same time capsule assignment. They called it from about Covid, and each subject had a piece of the time capsule. So, it was really history based, of course, but we each had a piece of it. So, of course, in English section we had writing assignments. We had poems. They had to

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analyze photos and give, you know, a reaction to them like empty streets and things like that and how times have changed. And then they submitted everything through classroom.

Right now, we're in phase three. And in phase three, what happened was each department to find their own their own piece now, which is supposed to be using the Department of Education's new guidelines that they want us to is really to push for next year. Like, what would they need to be learning, you know, to get prepared for next year. So now English is using a site called Common Lit, and they basically read a selection that's been chosen for them. So each of our grades got a different unit and we're reading selections. They're answering questions. They're annotating. It's a lot more English based which we really like. And they're answering the questions right on Common Lit, and we only have to correct the essay portion, and everything is scored out for us. It's pretty great. So, so far, so good. And we found that there are more people like more kids have responded really quickly to the Common Lit whereas the poems and everything from face to go a lot longer to get any work from.

**GREG:** *For MRS. SILVA's students, having more access to technology was key to participation. But engagement from some students will always be an issue.*

**MRS. SILVA:** Of course, we have a level issue you know of like we have the high achievers who were in the college classes already or the AP classes and then honors and college prep. That's how ours works. So, I teach mostly college prep. Besides the BSU class, and the college prep kids, they're a lot tougher, obviously, to get work from, even when they're sitting in front of you. So as far as the digital work, it has been more of a challenge. But this week we were finally able to hand out Chromebooks to kids that needed that. And I already received five students who had not handed anything in. They responded this week, and they've sent me everything. And they said, Sorry, I just didn't have access to a computer. So that's still one of the major challenges. Always technology. And, of course, like we always see them on their phones. So, we think that there Okay, that they'll have...honestly, we were surprised that I'm not like not enough of them were turning and work, and we're like they're on their phones all the time. Well, how did they not have work? And then ultimately, we found out that yeah, they just they didn't have Internet access or that free Internet that they got was limited by hours. You know, there's always something that was playing a role. So at least now that they've been, they've had access to Chromebooks, they're handing and more things.

**GREG:** *For Charlotte Boccuzzi, a special education paraprofessional at Mindess Elementary School in Ashland, online learning has provided students a variety of learning possibilities each week.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** They typically have...Ashland typically has a structure that they have learning a variety of options for the children to access throughout the week. They have it set up her day, so they expect kids to spend so much time on different programs such as Lexia, Raz Kids, PBS.com, those sorts of learning options. They also have literacy and math expectations that are set up. They're still doing their Pearson online learning so they could track where the children are exceeding and where they need help, and those programs are able to level them and give them the support they need to learn things they haven't yet.

**GREG:** *However, working with special education students online has presented a number of unique requirements to help meet the student needs.*

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**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** I specifically meet with three students that I am specifically dedicated to in third grade, and we meet on Wednesdays for an hour, or sometimes longer if they're if they're into it. We also meet with the general population as a whole in our special ed classroom on Fridays for an hour, going over different things that the kids have done. If there, you know what they've been doing, active wise, outside of just regular education, but also any questions or concerns that they have with the material that they've been given throughout the week.

**GREG:** *Lisa Honeyman is a math teacher at Newton South High School and explains their online schedule provides for a structure with some flexibility for teachers.*

**MRS. HONEYMAN:** There's a weekly schedule, and each teacher has an hour set aside for office hours for each of their courses. So, I have two hours set for office hours, one hour for my junior honors class and one hour from AP Statistics classes. Then we also have two days, Thursday and Friday, that have 1/2 hour class meeting time for each course, and it's structured the same way our schedule is during the school year when were physically present, and the reason we have Thursday and Friday is many of our classes meet four times a week. But we also have elective classes that meet twice a week, and we elective classes will meet either Thursday or Friday and then the full time classes, ones that meet four times a week, the teacher can pick whether it's going to meet on Thursday or Friday, and in some cases they're choosing to meet both, especially for like AP classes.

**GREG:** *While all would agree online, learning is not ideal for educators, there are some benefits to the online learning platform, as MRS. SILVA explains,*

**MRS. SILVA:** I think with Google Classroom, what's been really great about it is that they don't have to respond to me as if they would face to face, you know. So, they're so used to texting and what I liked about it so far is I have been having some really great conversations with them through Google Classroom like, even just leaving messages back and forth to each other. They had to write a reflection on how this particular time of their life has changed them, and some of them were really sad. And I feel really bad, you know, for what they've been going through, and I feel like the time has been flying, but I also have a house and a yard to go out to. You know, the kids. I live in the apartments here; I feel really bad for here. They feel like they're stuck, you know, and I think hearing from them...them hearing back from me like a few of them have been super nice and we miss you. And like, you don't get that in person sometimes at the high school level, you know? So, I think they really do miss school. I found it really interesting to read a whole bunch been saying, I never thought I'd say this, but I really must school. And they just miss the interaction with people. So, I feel bad. And at the same time, I think that the technology is helping keep that communication. If we didn't have any, I think it would be a lot worse. So for those of them, that have communicated, it's been really good for them too, not just us but for them.

**GREG:** *MRS. BOCCUZZI has discovered that students are taking more responsibility for their own activities and are learning a great deal about time management.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** They're definitely taking more responsibility for themselves. They are learning time management because they have certain things they need to get done. A lot of them tend to get their work done in the morning so they're able to go outside play on the trampoline, go for a walk, go bake brownies with their grandmother or something like that. They can structure their day so that they do get

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to have those break times in the afternoon. But that definitely depends on the parental rules in the house, so that seems to be working well. They're definitely in charge of their learning. They're in the driver's seat, I guess, in a way. And they are...they're learning how to structure their day and they're learning process.

**GREG:** *Students at the elementary level are becoming proficient with technology and presentation skills, which may serve them well in the future.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** I think the kids were definitely having fun with the camera on the Zoom meetings. I don't think they are used to seeing themselves on screen as much as they are, so they are experimenting with, you know, the device's background and you know, just the way they're presenting themselves in a Zoom call. So, I think they are, essentially learning, you know, in a way, presentation skills. And they're getting very comfortable with talking and seeing themselves on screen. So my hope is that, you know, with all this going on the that we're going to have a very large generation of people who are confident, articulate presenters because they are so used to this kind of interaction with small groups and large groups, and they're definitely getting more comfortable with this format.

**GREG:** *The flexibility provided to Newton South students allows them to schedule their day in a way that best works for them, as MRS. HONEYMAN explains.*

**MRS. HONEYMAN:** I'm finding that my students are able to learn a lot on their own, and we put together a weekly plan that gets posted Sunday night so that on Monday morning the students can take out a calendar and schedule everything they have to do for all their classes for the week. And one thing that's working for some kids is instead of spreading it out, you know, half an hour a day per class, they're just doing like all of math and history on Monday, and all of science and English on Tuesday. And then, so they're able to do their work in the way that works best for them, whether it be spread out over the whole week or in chunks and then moving on. So that flexibility has been good for kids. From my perspective, I'm working closely with my colleagues who teach the same courses. And when we're not actually meeting with students, we also have scheduled meeting time and working with them to come up with good examples, sharing the load when it comes to making podcasts for the kids or explanations that we post online has been good.

**GREG:** *As described by MRS. SILVA, what matters most is to give students the most opportunities possible to find success.*

**MRS. SILVA:** So, no finals. It's going to be continued, the work that they have. So everything...so say for English for instance, and that's what I can tell you that I have. They'll have one assignment per week, and they have the whole week to do it and then at the end, so the way they're going to be in school, technically until June 16th. And then, they said at the June 16th mark, if any of them still need to complete any work they will be able to because the teachers are supposed to work till June 22nd. So we have that grading window there. But were really kind of just saying, please just turn in your work, you know, like we'll give you anything. And like so, some of them are really, I guess, the way that how should word it? So, the way that the grading policy is working, it seems like if you get this work done that, you know, that we weren't in school for, it really could only help you. So especially for those kids, that's failed the first two terms, they need this desperately. So part of the grading policy will look as if, like, if

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they did, if they weren't doing well the first two terms, but then did well with their at home work, they may be able to get like 3.5 credits when the class is really 5 credits, but at least that's giving them an advantage. And next fall they would have to do look a remedial computer class to finish, and then they would get their extra credits. But It's better than failing the entire year, not getting any credits. So, you know, we're really trying to help them get the credits and, you know, earn them and do the best they can. It's just about turning in the work and having the technology to do so.

***GREG:** However, the transition to online learning has experienced a few bumps along the way, and students and families who may have already been dealing with difficult economic circumstances may experience even more obstacles to learning online.*

**MRS. SILVA:** I think that the technology is still a big piece. The other thing that we found was that a lot of them are essential workers...they're working in the grocery stores and dollar stores and a couple of them had worked at some convenience stores. So, they've been working. So when we haven't received any work back from a few of them and guidance has reached out and the teachers have reached out a lot of times, the parents will say, Oh, well, you know, she's been working 30 hours a week at the grocery store, you know, or something like that. So when she comes home, she's exhausted. You know, we've had a couple of stories like that. That would be one of the major things that's preventing them is those that are working are putting all their energy into work and not their schoolwork. But we did come up with...they just released a new grading policy for the end of the year, and I think that's going to get a lot more kids turning things in because that whole beginning phase, it was like, Oh, I don't have to do any work like we're going be back in school in two weeks or three weeks. And then as the weeks have gone by, they realized, Wow, now I need to catch up. But I think that we've made it pretty accessible for them to be able to catch up. And if they want to really good grade, they just need to get the work in. It's more about credit, you know, than the actual grade

***GREG:** For MRS. BOCCUZZI, technology has been a gift to keep her connected with her students, but sometimes can have a detrimental effect on their attention span.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** I would say yes, that does happen from time to time. The attention span seems to be a little bit lower they become bored with the conversation that we might be having, especially if it's directed to a specific task that they're general ed teacher or their, you know, our special ed teacher may have assigned to them. Definitely device challenges that we have depending on what they're using to access our meetings. Either it's the audio or the video or both. Sometimes they just can't log in for whatever reason on the occasion where I'm left alone in a Zoom meeting by myself and also getting mail sometimes. But what they would generally do is they would, if we were in a regular setting should be able to ask for help, or I could visually see that they're struggling with something. But being that we only have a certain amount of time that's dedicated to a certain task, generally, I can't...I don't have the ability into seeing what they need or how they're feeling, depending on, you know, what their body language is, or how they are verbally expressing that they are frustrated.

***GREG:** Students who may have been unengaged in the classroom before the shutdown are often even more difficult to reach online, as MRS. HONEYMAN describes.*

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**MRS. HONEYMAN:** The hardest part is kids who aren't engaged and trying to figure out how to reach them and what it is they need, because their reasons for disengagement are very different from one another. In some cases, the because I teach high school, the high school kids have taken on responsibility for caring for their younger siblings because their parents are working either because they're doctors and have to leave the home or they're working from home, but they're still trying to work. So for those kids, it's hard for them to balance their home responsibilities with their school responsibilities. Some of my kids who weren't engaged before all this started have become even harder to reach. You know, kids who weren't motivated to begin with, some of them think this is fantastic and have jumped right in, but the majority of them if they weren't engaged before, they're still really not all that engaged now, and it's harder to reach them. I can't invite them in as easily, you know, stay after class and I can talk to them at school. But here, if they won't engage, I can't like forced them onto the computer. There are a few students who have been a little bit more willing to kind of put themselves out there than they were in class. I think maybe they were shyer about speaking out when we were in a classroom. But here they can just reach out to me directly. And that seems to be working pretty well for a few. But mostly the kids who were the most participating in class are still the ones who, when I'm in a Zoom meeting and I asked the question, Are the ones that are likely to amuse themselves and say something.

**GREG:** *As many parents are becoming more and more comfortable working from home, some students are no different and find working on schoolwork from home to provide a new level of comfort, as illustrated by MRS. BOCCUZZI.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** Yeah, I would agree with that. I think we're seeing some students that are generally more nervous about writing. They are more engaged and able to have a little bit more without having the stress of being on the spot. They're able to be in their own home, they're comfortable, and they are, some of them are actually, I think, maybe flourishing a little bit with the situation you know, more so than they would be in a classroom where they might feel peer pressure and may not feel, you know, able to produce just like the rest around them. They're able to actually excel, right now, I would say, with what they're doing now in their own environment.

**GREG:** *what has had an important impact of the Mindess Elementary School is the great support provided to both staff and students by their principal, who was even featured by Ellen DeGeneres during the together at home television special.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** Ashland has done an amazing job getting technology out to all the kids that needed it. Well, that was really huge, and largely it was delivered by the administration. And they've been really wonderful and actually are. Our principle has been seen on Ellen. She did a shout out to him specifically for doing the dance parties that he goes around town and he does a dance party on various different streets. Throughout have the week and he always puts out a lovely message to our school, you know, working very hard to stay connected to the kids. His name is Mike Caira. Mike Caira's worked so hard to stay connected to the kids and make them feel, you know, that they are definitely still part of our Mindess community. And I just think he's done a fantastic job with that.

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**GREG:** *With the end of the school year in sight, teachers and administrators still are uncertain what the fall of 2020 will look like for schools. Since no one was able to anticipate the need for possible social distancing in the future. Bringing students into the building at Durfee High school, may be complex, as MRS. SILVA relates.*

**MRS. SILVA:** So I went to work today and to clean out my classroom. That's what they asked us to do and we thought about it and, see, our new building is not opening until the following year, and even then, that's going to be tighter quarters, even though it's a large, very large building almost the same square footage that we have now. But right now, we're separated, and the new building is more like straight hallways, so every class is going to be a lot closer. The kids are going to be a lot closer together, and this is just, you know, Covid wasn't a thing when they were designing schools, you know? So, it'll be interesting to see how that plays out. But as far as using our old building now, there is definitely going to have to be major adjustments. We only have three lunches and they're huge. So somehow and those already start at, like 11 a.m. so I mean so it's like some kids feel like they're eating breakfast when the bell rings, you know, instead of lunch. So that's going to be a major challenge, I think the hallways are going to be a major challenge as far as passing time because that's where the crowds tend to linger. I think in certain classrooms it'll be okay, but class size is going to be a huge factor. They just announced we're supposed to get \$140 million from a grant in the state, and they were going to hire 140 new employees. And the superintendent said on Monday that that's probably not going to happen. And if they have to cut somewhere, they're going to cut those jobs that were never really made yet, you know. So that's unfortunate, because that was going to hopefully help bring our numbers that a little bit if we could divide up a little more, so I'm not sure. My classroom has the tables and at least the kids are a little further apart, even though they share the table. But the classes that have the rows and the tight seats and 29 kids in the room. I'm not sure how it's going to work, but they haven't given us any guidance yet. They've been really looking towards the governor. You know, every time he comes on the air to say what's going to happen, what is he going to stay? And that's like what's happening with graduation, too. We just don't know

**GREG:** *for MRS. BOCCUZZI, the fall may still be uncertain, but she would love to return to the building with her students if it is safe to do so.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** We have only just begun speaking about that. There's really no intel on that. I think they're trying to figure it out, just like the rest of the world is. I know that they would love to get back to our business as usual, but I think there are definitely challenges that we struggle with especially, we have a very large population of students, so having things being socially distant is going to be definitely challenging.

**GREG:** *Whatever the fall eventually looks like for students and educators, an incredible amount of planning will be necessary. As MRS. HONEYMAN explains, the Newton Public Schools hope to provide teachers time to plan for next year, as this academic year comes to a close.*

**MRS. HONEYMAN:** We know that they are talking about it, and they're talking about different options. We know that we will have some planning time before school ends this year. Once we know what it

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might look like to try to at least preemptively do some planning. But it's so vague right now, we really have no idea.

**GREG:** *Universally, teachers like MRS. BOCCUZZI simply miss seeing their students every day.*

**MRS. BOCCUZZI:** Ah, we are very excited to hopefully get back to school at some point. And, not seeing the kids has definitely been more of an impact than I would have thought I would have felt, but definitely especially cleaning up my classroom yesterday, that was definitely quite a hit and an emotionally taxing. So, it's a very sad thing, but I think you know everybody's feeling that and hopefully we'll be able to find some normalcy soon.

**GREG:** *And while meeting students online provides some level of engagement for educators with their students, for MRS. HONEYMAN. It just isn't the same as seeing them in person in her classroom.*

**MRS. HONEYMAN:** I missed my students. I think that's the hardest part. It's like, so nice to see them when they're on screen. And it's so frustrating when some of them choose to not have their picture on the screen, because I miss seeing them. And I miss the responsiveness. When I'm in class, if I put a new concept out there and I want to check in with them, usually I could look at their faces. And in a math class, you can see the confusion on kid's faces when they don't get something. And I'm not seeing that so well. And that makes teaching harder and sadder. Someone said, Distance learning It's all of the challenges that in person education isn't and none of the fun.

**GREG:** *We hope this podcast has provided you with some insight on how educators are dealing with and adapting to online programs during this Corona Virus Covid 19 school shutdown. We would like to thank Rachel Silva of Durfee High School in Fall River, Charlotte Boccuzzi of Mindess Elementary School in Ashland and Lisa Honeyman of Newton South High School for joining us this month and providing insight as educators continue to provide educational opportunities for their students online. Thank you for joining us. I'm GREG Cunningham. This has been a production of JFYNetWorks.*