

JFYNet Podcast – APRIL 2021, Teacher & Student from Kingsman Charter in DC: Some students more focused in online school.

GREG: *This month's podcast features a conversation with Crystal Seawood and Takaria, a teacher and student at JFYNetWorks partner Kingsman Academy Public Charter School in Washington, DC, as they discuss life before the school shutdown.*

TAKARIA: goes as if we're back in the school building.

GREG: Students may actually be more focused working in the online model...

MS. SEAWOOD: Because once you remove all of those physical barriers in school, kids are able to really focus on learning.

GREG: *What a perfect educational world might look like at least for some students and teachers.*

MS. SEAWOOD: If there was a way to have some hybrid model between virtual and physical, maybe like going to school two days a week, for my introvert self that would be sufficient.

GREG: *This podcast was created by JFYNetWorks, a Boston based nonprofit provider of online 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 5 through high school, with personal support online and via phone from friendly learning specialists like yours truly. For JFYNetWorks, I'm Greg Cunningham.*

Kingsman Academy Public Charter School is an open-enrollment school that welcomes all students into a comfortable, therapeutic environment with personal attention and multi-tiered behavioral and academic supports. Over multiple years, the school has been redesigned from the ground up, bringing in evidence-based research strategies from inside and outside of education to rebuild Kingsman Academy around the students they serve. Redesigned learning spaces, restorative practices, project-based learning, customized technology platforms, and personalized competency-based instruction are strategies that come to life at Kingsman to better serve their students. Due to the pandemic, the school has been forced to operate remotely this academic year. An online version of the school presents new challenges to a diverse population of students who already face many challenges related not just to education, but to life itself.

Nonetheless, many students and teachers are finding great success using this model. Our conversation this month with teacher Crystal Seawood and her student Takaria focused on her educational achievements. JFY Learning Specialist Joan Reissman also participated in the conversation.

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GREG: *Takaria would you please start by telling us about yourself? Who you are, things you like to do, hobbies, anything that you want to share?*

TAKARIA: I'm 17 years old. I like drawing and coloring adult coloring books. A lot of books such as this one right here, this first one, The Peaceful Garden. It shows all kinds of garden things. I'm working on the first one, but I finished two of them, and they have more. I was drawing inspiration for other people too.

GREG: *You've been a student at Kingsman Academy for how long?*

TAKARIA: Six years.

GREG: *How would you say school was before you went online? A year ago, everything kind of shut down. Before that, how was school for you? What was school like? What were your typical days like?*

TAKARIA: I would hang out with my friends at breakfast, and then do the same thing for lunch. We would go to the music room and I would learn how to play the guitar while they sat there. I'd play on the drums and other stuff. Class was good. It was okay. But now in quarantine, it's like any day, go back in the school building.

GREG: *And you're getting a lot of work done online. How is that working out for you?*

TAKARIA: It's working out well. Because I use my phone to help me out sometimes.

GREG: *Are you spending more time working in the online programs than you would normally spend on schoolwork when you were there in person?*

TAKARIA: No, I would do the same thing, but I would ask for help too.

GREG: *Were you this diligent when you were there in person? Getting this much work done?*

TAKARIA: Yeah. Whenever I would do work, I would either chill out or see if other kids needed help with their work.

GREG: Your teacher, Ms. Seawood, just made a face when you said that. So, I'm going to ask her...Do you think Takaria is doing more work now online than when she was there in person?

MS. SEAWOOD: I think Takaria is doing significantly more work online. I think she has always had the instinct to be really focused on her work. However, being online has removed all those physical markers of schooling-- the social interactions, the bathroom breaks, going to different school wide functions and things like that. Online, kids are really able to focus on the assignments and then close their computers and go back to

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sleep, right? So Takaria has really just been powering through so much work. You tell me a lot, “I don't have anything else to do.” So, when she isn't in the school building all day she's investing all that time in her schoolwork and she's definitely getting a lot more done. Do you think that's an accurate statement, Takaria?

TAKARIA: Yes, because it's true.

MS. SEAWOOD: Can you elaborate more about why it's true for you?

TAKARIA: Because when we were in school, we show you the work that we did and ask you for help. But now that it's on my computer and online, we can just show our screen and show you what we did and ask for help. I guess when it was in school, we really didn't have that much work. But since it's been online, since quarantine, we have a lot of time on our hands. So, I use all that time doing my work and helping others out sometimes too.

JOAN: You're more focused on yourself now. You can focus on your work and what you have to do.

GREG: Is it easier? Knowing that you're self-paced, meaning as soon as I finish this I know I've got something else to do, instead of just going at the same pace as everybody else. You can work at whatever pace you want. Does that make it easier?

TAKARIA: Yeah, because like in Ms. Seawood's class, if I started on an article in Ms. Abraham's class, I'd finish it in Ms. Seawood's class and then go into math on Mathspace and do my work there.

GREG: *MS. SEAWOOD, it's got to be challenging for you because you've got all these different students doing all different things, and you're meeting with them online as well. How is that going for you?*

MS. SEAWOOD: Well, actually, I found online sports to be quite refreshing because again, once you remove all of those physical barriers in school, kids are able to really focus on the learning. And I found that since we've been able to focus on learning only...well granted, I do think they're finding other ways to still be social, which I'm grateful to see. But it hasn't really been as challenging for us because we modified our schedule. I do know that other students may be experiencing challenges because of the schedule, even my own kids are kind of struggling. This week as they implemented a hybrid learning model, they have to get up earlier, and the school day is looking more like a school day in a physical building. But at Kingsman we modified the school day and the students' schedules. We reduced class periods to 30 minutes. We give them 15-minute breaks in between classes and usually by one o'clock they're done with school for the day.

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I have found them to be incredibly less resistant in class, and it's just really going smoothly for us. We have a unique student population with needs that a traditional school model would not be able to meet. Our students are very independent and have varying life schedules. Our model gives them accessibility to manipulate time as they need it to be. We have frequent check-ins, and every student can really work at their own pace. I think we've found success in that, and the virtual school model has given us more ability to implement independent, competency-based learning.

GREG: *I'm guessing that a lot of your students have responsibilities outside of school between jobs and...*

MS. SEAWOOD: Yes, a lot of our students are working, as are our parents, so they really need to be able to manipulate time throughout the day. And our school model makes that really accessible.

GREG: *Joan, can you talk about how you're setting up the tasks for the students and keeping up?*

JOAN: *I can hardly keep up. You guys do so much work to keep me busy, which is great! I always say I look at your group and I always see one student out of things to do and I know who that is.*

We're relating the curriculum to the educational functioning levels. Ms. Kelly wanted us to focus the curriculum on the skills students would need to progress to the next level. So, I design structures and I look at the areas that are needed for that particular level, and I draw across the grades within that structure to create the topics-- say, fractions. There are fractions on different levels. Say you were in eighth grade. It's more of a holistic concept, like if you were in adult education, which I think works well for Kingsman because you don't always have the typical student. Your students have a lot of other things going on in their lives. Hopefully this is a more streamlined way of absorbing learning. Then I make the test. I make a mixture of things, and I take things that I think will be picked for testing, the topics that are more relevant. That's why if I feel that the concept is a little more difficult since they're doing it online and not with a textbook, because it's not a regular math class, I sometimes make assignments a little bit longer than I normally would. That was just a supplement to an hour's worth of math class.

GREG: *And Ms. Seawood, you meet with the students, not just for math, but you also have support for students and meetings with students during the week. Can you talk about those meetings?*

MS. SEAWOOD: Sure. I have two students who work full time and we usually meet, have check-ins, one day of the week in the middle of the week. We meet for however

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long they need to meet, and what works well for them is that I provide them with a checklist. We track progress. We see areas of improvement, clarify any points of confusion, and develop another plan for the next week. So, what I've found is, how I've tried to be this year for students, my model is I don't want to stress them out. So, I don't assign homework at all, and I try to be very flexible to meet their needs while still having high expectations for achievement. I do think there could be more flexibility when it comes to having students achieve. I'm not trying to police them in a sense

GREG: *And having students work in a self-paced mode probably helps because it takes some of the pressure off.*

MS. SEAWOOD: What's also been helpful since going online is that there's been much more synchronicity between teachers, parents and students. That has been really helpful to have a better relationship with parents.

GREG: *One more question for you, Takaria. If you could choose one favorite thing about Kingsman Academy Charter School, what would that be?*

TAKARIA: Most schools work on the grades. One time before quarantine, one of the teachers said that at a regular school they focus on the grade level and just give students grade-level work. So like if you're in 9th grade but you can work at the 12th grade level, they will still just give you 9th grade work. But here, if you're in the 9th grade but you're able to work at the 12th grade level, they can give you 12th grade work.

GREG: *So that is individualized, and it really helps to motivate you. I'm sure you're looking forward to getting back in the building, though.*

TAKARIA: Yes.

MS. SEAWOOD: My introverted self says no, I feel like I have blossomed from the roots this year. But I do think if there was a way to have some hybrid model between virtual and physical, maybe like going to school two days a week, for my introvert self that would be sufficient.

GREG: *We would like to sincerely thank Crystal Seawood, Takaria and Joan Reissman for joining us on this month's podcast. If you have any questions or comments, please navigate to our website, jfynet.org, which features a wealth of commentary, dialogue, and free scholastic resources, including this monthly podcast, which support **all** educational communities. Thank you for joining us. For JFYNetWorks, I'm Greg Cunningham.*