

TRANSCRIPTION

Crystal M.: On March 19th 2020, COVID-19 forced schools to abruptly close and shift to online and hybrid learning, uprooting the lives of caregivers, students, and all school personnel. This podcast series will center the voices of caregivers, students, and school staff members as they discuss their online and hybrid learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this podcast series, multiple stakeholders will gain first-hand insight into the various ways caregivers, students, and school staff members navigated and continue to navigate schooling during a pandemic.

Crystal M.: The goals of this podcast series are to provide stakeholders first-hand accounts of caregivers, students, and school staff members experiences during online and hybrid learning, and provide opportunities for stakeholders to better understand caregivers, students, and school staff members' challenges and triumphs so they can support caregivers, students, and school staff members during the continuing pandemic and beyond.

Crystal M.: We would like to thank the students, caregivers, and school staff members for taking the time to share their experiences with us. We appreciate you all.

[Transition music]

Counselor: So my experience within the district during COVID-19 has been...I work with several students, and we've had to really alter a lot of how we work with them. Because normally my role in the school is more hands-on, it's more face-to-face, is a lot of confidentiality. So, with it being virtual, a lot of students aren't more open. They're not as open as they normally would be because of their surroundings, because of that confidentiality portion. So,

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what I've had to do is learn how to navigate through COVID, and figure out how we could still connect with students while they're at home.

Crystal M.: Did you find any strategies that worked pretty well?

Counselor: Well, some of the strategies were that just to try to rebuild that rapport with them, just to try to rebuild our confidentiality stance. We've also done a lot of groups to have them feel still connected with other students. So we would do like "lunch bunch groups," and I have to admit it was very difficult. Some students aren't as willing to participate as they normally would have. And once school opened back up, we saw the difference.

Crystal M.: And in terms of you and your role, could you speak to the level of support that you receive from administration, whether inside the school or the district as a whole?

Counselor: We received a lot of support. We were actually able to have funding available. So, another part of my position was not only just to offer support for students; it was as staff as well. So, we were able to build a recharge room, just a relaxation room for teachers, when they felt stressed out. And a place where they could go and just take their mind off of things. We were able to do morning minutes with them. So, the administration understood the need for more support for both the staff and students, because without mental health for staff and it wasn't working for the students.

Crystal M.: Yeah. Absolutely. How do you feel about your safety being back in the school when the students came back?

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- Counselor:** Now, with the safety portion of it, in all honesty, I mean, they try to clean everything as much as possible, but again, once...my role is more of the one-on-one interaction. So, where, with the teachers, they could still have a classroom full of students, and they could still remain behind their desk and still communicate with them.
- Counselor:** With myself, it's more one-on-one, and they're in my office, and so it's not as I would have like. Meaning that, being as comfortable as I normally would have with students being in my office, it's not something that...I'm...at the...same comfort, you know...I don't have the same comfortability as I normally would have, just because of that time that small space.
- Crystal M.:** That's understandable. So, the last thing I'll ask is, do you have any advice that you would provide to either teachers, administrations, parents, caregivers, kids, about learning during this pandemic? Or just in existing, like, staying well during this pandemic?
- Counselor:** Well, one of the things is just remaining...what...for parents, I would say, and I know that it becomes stressful for them a lot in there. A lot of them said that they're not teachers, but to actually monitor their students. It doesn't have to be right then and right there, but to just do check-ins with them. For the students and teachers, it's also remaining staying connected to the school. Because once the connection is lost, the students aren't doing the work, the teachers are frustrated because they are constantly trying, as far as with the counseling team.
- Counselor:** We are continually trying to reach out to students, and as well as their academics and their emotional needs. And so it becomes difficult when

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everyone is disconnected. So, one of the things that I would say is just to build that connection, keep in touch with your teachers. Say when things aren't going on, say when you don't have that internet.

Counselor: Make up the work. If parents can't leave their students at home during the day, have them do it at night. Change the schedule. Those things will work. You have to just readjust what you feel is the norm. I think that's where we're losing a lot, is that they're looking for what was normal to them. And we aren't willing to accept that things aren't gonna look the same.

Crystal M.: Yeah, we will definitely have a new normal.

Counselor: Yes.

Crystal M.: So, you have anything else you want to share?

Counselor: Um, let me think. I don't...I was trying to think if there was any other suggestions or things from a counseling perspective? But like I said, right now, it is just a lot of communication. Please stay in contact with schools. That is the most helpful for everyone, is the communication. And just to let us know when things aren't going right; we're understanding to those things, and how we can be of assistance to you.

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