

WELCOME THE CHANGE: A NEW WAY

Remote learning can take a bit of creativity, but can also lead to success.

BY LAURIE HARTT

Could at-home schooling be as easy as a cardboard study carrel? It's no secret that conventional learning will look very different for the foreseeable future, bringing new challenges for both children and parents. Thinking outside the box—or repurposing it altogether—just might be the name of the game for student success.

Patience for Parents

An A+ approach toward distance learning begins with parents and guardians, and it all starts with patience. “Parents need to stay patient and take it easy with themselves and their kids,” Nancy Levy, a fifth-grade English and social studies teacher at Malibu Elementary School, said. “We are all going through this together, so remember we are all on the same team.”

Ari Jacobs, a seventh-grade world history and 10th-grade English teacher at Malibu Middle and Malibu High

School, agreed: “The skill of patience is the most important aspect to teaching.”

After a deep breath and a cup of Zen, then connection and communication is key. Taking the opportunity to communicate as much as possible and getting involved in your children's studies, what they're working on and where their interests lie is crucial to keeping at-home schooling a positive experience for both parents and students. Jacobs said this is a unique opportunity to be a deeper part of your child's education.

“Soon enough, whenever that is, we will be back in physical classrooms and parents will return to hearing one-word answers like ‘fine’ when asking about a complete school day,” he said. “Distance learning is a unique time in life to be able to connect with your children; take full advantage of it.”

While remote education won't always be easy, and will most certainly be a challenge on many fronts, Levy suggested parents look at it from another angle if possible.

“Welcome the change,” she said. “Find how to use this new way of learning to build your family, your bond, your shared knowledge.

Look at it as an opportunity instead of a burden.”



OF SCHOOLING

Creativity for Kids

With the family fully onboard, it's time to get students excited to be in school. With additional distractions at home and easier access to toys, electronics and pajamas, it's crucial to keep kids focused and energized about their learning.

Levy recommended a dedicated study area for each student, whether in preschool or in high school, and suggested that kids have the option of personalizing and decorating their space.

"Have the student design their study space, even if it is only a cardboard carrel," she said. "It is really important for each student to have their own quiet workspace where all the necessary tools and books live, and distractions such as phones (and siblings!) are kept out of the space."

If students work best with a little background noise, consider some instrumental music.

"I know there are lots of ambient playlists my students used to like to have on during class," Levy observed.

For the actual schoolwork, Jacobs is firmly in the camp of connecting learning to the real world and, if possible, the students' lives. The more relevant and out-of-the-textbook, he said, the more interested students are. In his own teaching, Jacobs relies on art, music, story telling, pop culture, game playing, discussion, philosophy and political cartoons to help with student engagement.

"Distance learning allows for some experiences students do not usually have and they should be excited about," he said. "Hopefully, they will be doing a variety of creative projects and collaboration, using resources and websites that will allow them to see learning in many new ways and actually make them better prepared for college and beyond."

Focus Time

Staying on task can be a challenge for learners of every age—parents included. To keep your kids focused on schoolwork and class assignments, consider positive reinforcement as your guiding light. This is a unique time in children's lives to learn accountability and self-sufficiency in a new format, so encouragement is essential to maintain the new responsibility.

To foster focused learning, Jacobs said, kids should have clear instructions about the task at hand, along with many daily

opportunities to digitally engage with teachers and peers, both as a whole class and in small group formats. It's also important, he said, to keep older students accountable for their grades and other school requirements.

Intangible rewards may be another option, especially for younger learners.

"I think working hard and then getting a reward for that hard work, maybe a family walk or something else active to

bring [everyone] together, is motivating and good for the whole family," Levy said. "This reinforces the importance of both sustained focusing time and then active together time."

She also recommended using a timer to break studies into timed chunks.

"Have kids build stamina by seeing how long they can focus, then taking a one- or two-minute active break, then trying to improve that focus time. This is a really good way for students to learn to self-monitor."

Levy and Jacobs, both highly respected and well-loved teachers in the area, come to the table with the perfect blend of classroom and real-world experience.

"Ideas come from literally everywhere," Jacobs said. "Luckily for me, I have two

school-aged children of my own, so I can bounce all kinds of things off of them."

Levy also has 25 years of experience from teaching at Juan Cabrillo Elementary School before moving to Malibu Elementary, and brings new suggestions to the table from reading, learning and practicing.

Most importantly, both educators are keen listeners and tuned into the needs of parents and teachers alike. Jacobs, for example, heard one request in specific: getting to be with their pets, dogs or cats while you learn.

"Over the years I have heard so many students tell me they wish their dogs could come to school with them," he said. "Now they can."

Both also agree it's especially important to listen to your children, listen to others and ask for help. "Parents should never hesitate to contact their child's teachers to ask any clarifying questions whenever necessary," Jacobs said.

Levy agreed: "Take cues from your kids. It is your kids' learning. Let them lead it, own it, and ask them—and their teachers—how best to support their growth." ■

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