



DARDEN SCHOOL
of BUSINESS



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Frame-Up! Coach!

Community Challenge

The Coronavirus pandemic meant shifting from brick-and-mortar-based education to online learning—in a hurry. For the most part, it was up to superintendents and principals to be arbiters of how that would work. At Sandia Elementary, located only eight miles from the Texas border, it would be Matthew Vetterly who led the charge. “Teaching in the classroom is the most impactful piece of the educational process,” he said. Yet Vetterly and his team were quick to move to pandemic instruction—the phase in-between doors closing and online learning. “It was not teaching,” he said. “It was triage, instructions everyone needed to know to function online.” For example, early in that transition, Vetterly heard from one teacher that a student had logged in while lying in bed shirtless as his mother handed him a sandwich.

Action Taken

While student teaching at an affluent elementary school, Vetterly was told that “real teaching” took place in Title I schools. “That set me on a path to serve,” he said. Along the way, he participated in the Principals Pursuing Excellence (PPE) program and became a mentor to other administrators. The modeling and strategies Vetterly learned from PPE and used at his school and with mentees, was exactly what he applied to teaching through a pandemic. It fit perfectly to handle online observations and improve staff and student performance.

The template Vetterly relied on was the same one he used to coach his teachers. Instead of saying “oh you are the worst teacher in America!” he would focus on something the teacher did well. Then home in on one item to fix (even if there were many more to work on) and offer a strategy or framework to think about. Then he would follow up with actionable feedback and look at the issue again.

Using the same methodology Vetterly had a solid plan about how the school was going to meet standards of children learning during COVID-19. They had to understand why students performed the way they did. In brick-and-mortar classes, children were taught how to turn and talk to their fellow students in the desk beside them. “With online instruction, they needed to “frame-up” in the front row,” Vetterly said. That meant students putting one hand on their head and the other on their belly. If they could see either on the screen, they needed to adjust how they

were sitting and where the screen camera was focused. “It was just a strategy to help keep students engaged so we don’t have a skills deficit,” he said. Pandemic instructions were then followed with online learning which Vetterly said was led thoughtfully and well planned out. “After figuring out what gaps there were to meeting needs of kids online,” Vetterly said. “It meant implementing a solid plan of how to meet standards.”

Take Away

Among the most valuable functions of the PPE according to Vetterly was when the odds seem against him, “we can coach people up!” PPE forced educators to network with other districts and learn a common language of strategies across the state. “We want to grow all our kids, and our collective brilliance in New Mexico was untapped,” Vetterly said. “An investment in school leadership is an investment in New Mexico’s future.”