

Call and Response: What did teaching during the pandemic teach you?



I know it sounds daunting to be all subject-area-content all the time, but I used to depend on me being an engaging and passionate teacher for the culture of my classroom to thrive. This year, I made sure to have a fun check in question or activity for students to do as soon as they walked into my room or entered the Google Meet. I got more than the usual level of participation with the “fun” content in class activities. I also found more students talking about the activities and engaging with each other more. I hope to continue to do this in my future years of teaching.

Something I do not want to go back to is a larger classroom size. In order to keep things somewhat safe, school administration limited the number of students that were allowed to be in the building and in the classroom. In a normal year, I could have anywhere between 36 and 38 students in a class; this year, the largest number of students I have had in the classroom is 18! Although I love the life and excitement that comes with a large class, there are a lot of positives to smaller class sizes: grading is faster, I could provide more one-on-one attention, and I could check in with every student in an hour without missing anyone or feeling rushed. I’m hoping my school will realize the importance of class size and try to honor that again in the future.

– **ANTHONY TEDALDI, SENIOR FELLOW**

In my seat observing teachers and students during the pandemic, I saw how much our students appreciated the intentional moments to check in with each other and

their teachers, and continue to build community. What I don't look forward to is the idea that our students are now at a learning "deficit." It creates a narrative that will further harm our students who have demonstrated amazing resilience. I hope they return to schools that honor their courage and perseverance and strive to move forward from where they are, not where they "should be."

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- **CAMDEN HANZLICK-BURTON, SENIOR FELLOW**

I recognized two things as really important during the pandemic. First was the importance of normalcy and routine. Every day pre-March 2020, I swung into my classroom from the hallway as the bell rang and said "Good morning wonderful people, welcome back to biology and happy [day of the week]!" I didn't realize how grounding that was for students until five different kids emailed me after my first video lesson to tell me how glad they were to hear me start with that same greeting even though everything else was different. The second and more important thing was the importance of connection. I've taught primarily in-person this year, and the moments that carry me through the day rarely have anything to do with my content. So I've been working on making more time to tell jokes, share sketches and pictures, and do the silly things that build the culture and the community. This way no one has to feel alone, even just for a brief moment.

- **JAMIE MELTON, SENIOR FELLOW**

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