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MEDIA MAY CONTACT: Amy Bolton,
Mobile: (480) 389-9033; abolton@susd.org

Educators Share Their Perspectives on Teaching through a Pandemic

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (April 22, 2020) – At a time when educators are typically reflecting on their students’ progress over the course of the school year, the current pandemic caused by the coronavirus brings a unique lens through which to view this year’s efforts.

On a week’s notice, Scottsdale Unified School District’s (SUSD) 1,359 teachers pivoted from direct, classroom instruction of students to delivering their lessons online on various computer platforms, such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams. The District’s instructional technology coaches conducted online training sessions for teachers in the days leading up to the March 23 launch of online instruction. Teachers took that knowledge, transformed the curriculum and their lesson plans, and have run with it. Principals have taken notice.

“I am incredibly proud of the Hohokam and Yavapai Elementary staff for the dedication, effort and grace they’ve demonstrated as we quickly transitioned from traditional classrooms to online learning,” says Principal Chuck Rantala. “By collaborating and learning from each other, our teachers have successfully launched rigorous online lesson plans that allow learning to continue while schools are temporarily closed.”

The stories of how teachers are rising to the occasion are coming in from across the District. Chaparral High School Principal Todd Dreifort was confident his staff was up to the challenge. “All of our teachers have embraced this opportunity to become better educators and better communicators. While there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction with students, I can report that Chaparral continues to thrive, and that quality teaching and learning is taking place.”

Mountainside Middle School mathematics teacher Linda Moran helps answer the question, “What has it been like, teaching through the pandemic?” For her, the change has meant an unexpected opportunity to become a student herself. “In addition to thinking about how to redeliver content in a meaningful way to my students, I knew I had to become familiar with new software very quickly. Teachers are problem-solvers,” Moran continues, “and do anything they can to find a way to help their students.”

Learning new software is just one of many ways in which SUSD teachers have been pouring themselves into online learning. “I have become a real whiz with Google Classroom,” says Chaparral Advanced Placement U.S. History teacher Twyla Preising. She has found that fellow teachers have been most helpful in helping her transition from ‘classroom to cloud.’
Preising adds that students are leveraging the transition to learn some of the soft skills that can help them prepare for college or the workforce. “My students have adapted well to the online learning. I think they like accessing their materials at the beginning of a unit, and then working more at their own pace before assignments are due. I also like that I am hearing from them throughout the day as they have questions.”

Those valuable, soft skill lessons are also manifesting at the middle school level, where Paula Vaughn’s seventh and eighth grade science students at Echo Canyon School are used to working on Chromebooks. Despite missing seeing her students in-person on a daily basis, Vaughn believes good things will come out of this new, online learning experience. “Students have had to be more accountable for their learning since I am not there to oversee every aspect of how the work is being completed. Time management and self-direction are valuable lessons for middle school students and are helping prepare them for their next-level of learning in high school.”

Even our littlest learners have shown remarkable resilience. Hohokam-Yavapai kindergarten teacher Marjorie Siqueiros agrees that COVID-19’s education ‘curveball’ has been and will continue to be transformative. “I have seen some amazing grit in my students and their parents. I think one of the best things about this is that it has pushed students and teachers past their comfort levels and it is redefining education.” Siqueiros says she plans to incorporate online learning in her classroom from this point forward.

“The lessons I have seen from teachers have been creative and meaningful, allowing our students to continue their learning from home,” says Echo Canyon Principal Kat Hughes. “We miss our students tremendously, but know that the safest place for them to be right now is at home.”

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**About the Scottsdale Unified School District**

Located northeast of metropolitan Phoenix, the District serves the educational needs of students and families of 23,000 students across 29 campuses. Approximately 240,476 people reside within its boundaries. The District’s award-winning academic, arts and athletic programs draw students from Phoenix, Paradise Valley, Fountain Hills, Tempe and Scottsdale. A highly experienced, professionally certified teaching staff fosters a diverse and rigorous educational environment to develop the potential in every individual learner. Offering gifted learning, special education, career and technical education, and a variety of athletics, arts and enrichment programs and clubs, SUSD provides the rich environment today’s students need to explore their interests, develop important social skills and grow into tomorrow’s leaders. For more information, visit [www.susd.org](http://www.susd.org) and follow along on social media: Facebook: [@ScottsdaleUSD](https://www.facebook.com/ScottsdaleUSD), Twitter: [@ScottsdaleUSD](https://twitter.com/ScottsdaleUSD), Instagram: [@ScottsdaleUnifiedSD](https://www.instagram.com/ScottsdaleUnifiedSD), Nextdoor, LinkedIn and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com).