



MAP ACADEMY

**Education Disruption Podcast** / April 2, 2020

**Episode 11: The Pivot**

[educationdisruption.org](http://educationdisruption.org)

---

**Josh:** We don't have a time to go over today. We didn't want to cancel it, though we wanted to have a quick check-in with everybody answer any questions.

**Rachel:** If there's any other, particularly students that are really isolated. [crosstalk]

**Nick:** Map Academy is a charter school in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Like all schools in Massachusetts and many around the country, they've been ordered to close during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Map Academy model is uniquely set up to adapt in a time of crisis. How did a school pivot from delivering **[00:00:30]** a blended learning experience to becoming a fully remote school without sacrificing any of its services? On this special edition episode of *Education Disruption*, we'll talk to the school staff to find out. This was recorded the first full week of the shutdown. First, we'll talk to co-founders Josh and Rachel.

**Josh:** It feels like two years, but I think it's been seven days. First and foremost, our immediate thought was how are we going to provide students support remotely?

**Rachel:** **[00:01:00]** We had already made it clear to our staff that there was no question around here, not even for a heartbeat of whether or not we were remaining an active school.

**Josh:** We made an intentional effort to convey the message that Map Academy was closed for onsite classes, but we were continuing essential operations, meaning that we were going to continue to provide food for kids. We're going to continue to provide access to mental health supports that we provide here, both with our in-house clinical staff **[00:01:30]** and with our outside providers.

**Nick:** The students who go to Map Academy really depend on these resources. The purpose of a school like Map is to serve youth that have been failed by the traditional public school system for one reason or another. Those reasons range from mental health issues, being system-involved, homelessness, substance abuse, eating, to work during school hours, all things that Map provides some level of support for. For some students, the meals they get at Map might be their only access to food on any given day. Beyond just food, in the midst of this pandemic, **[00:02:00]** Map had to rethink how to serve students who relied on the school for mental health support.

**Maxanne:** We've always been-

**Nick:** That's Maxanne, a social worker at Map Academy.

**Maxanne:** At Map Academy, we've always been outside the box thinking and that's continuing like nothing is being squashed in terms of ideas or how we can support families.

**Speaker 5:** The culture here is very much that the collective is all-in. In fact, we had more people telling us that they wanted to work on-site asking one of the hardest things at the beginning, **[00:02:30]** when we first set up the protocol for this new normal was having to tell some staff that they couldn't be here.

**Nick:** That new normal meant only a small group of staff could continue working onsite and the rest had to work remotely. With most of the staff working from home, the next hurdle was to figure out how exactly to deliver instruction remotely. Josh and Rachel explained that the system the students already use to complete work doesn't require students to be physically at school anyway.

**Josh:** We didn't spend a tremendous amount of time setting up our academic model **[00:03:00]** to be reachable outside school because it's already set up that way. Rachel and I found that the school with a belief that learning can take place inside the school walls, but it can also take place outside the school walls because it's a foundational belief of Map Academy--that we know that life is going to get in the way for our students. Instead of trying to tackle the attendance problem and saying, "No, you have to be here at this time in this place with this teacher to learn this subject," we had already removed that barrier with the whole **[00:03:30]** model of asynchronous blended learning.

**Nick:** To translate, asynchronous learning at Map means students learn the same material, but at different times and locations. Blended learning means teachers can use a combination of assigning work virtually and face-to-face instruction.

**Rachel:** We already have as a model, a lot of the things that other districts and schools across the world are trying to establish now because we already have a platform for digital learning, asynchronous learning. We're already blended. We already had one-to-one **[00:04:00]** technology. We already had a lot of the things, what we were missing and what kept coming up in our strategy, we rely very much on the personal connections that are happening here in this place and so we don't have a digital community really. We needed to figure out some way of creating the place, at least a platform for which shared community could happen since it couldn't happen here at Map.

**Nick:** Map is uniquely positioned so that students could continue making progress even if they did have **[00:04:30]** to stay home. There were just a few extra pieces to put in place so that students and families could access all the resources that Map was offering and the community could still stay connected virtually.

**Josh:** We scrambled to get everything in one coherent place on the website so that students and families could go to one spot to get everything that they needed in this time, instead of searching around for all of it. We termed it the Virtual Student Center. It has everything from a tutorial video -- **[00:05:00]** in this video, we'll show you how you can access everything you need to continue to make academic progress, how to communicate with teachers. We have a live chat room staffed every day from 8:30 in the morning till three o'clock in the afternoon. You can chat live with teachers via video chat.

**Rachel:** You'll also find a link where you can request tech support if you're having issues with your Chromebook, lost your charger, or need help getting internet access and a link where you can

request delivery or pickup of food, printed copies of things [00:05:30] you're working on, or counseling or nurse check-in and, or any other support that you may need.

I know other districts are literally sending home packets and parents are becoming homeschool teachers virtually overnight. We're literally saying no, just engage with the tracker and Google Classroom and your teachers will be there to offer you support and teaching that way. We are trying to take that pressure off of the parents, that they don't have to act in that way as well.

**Josh:** There's a form that a student [00:06:00] or a staff member can fill out that will request student support, whether it's they need food, they need to check in with a counselor. They need a check-in with the school nurse and all of that set up automatically so that when those forms are filled out, it triggers an email to the appropriate personnel here that are on-site.

**Nick:** Map is very strategic about how they're serving their entire student body remotely, basically it's divide and conquer.

**Josh:** We basically took the whole [00:06:30] student roster, separated it into caseload.

**Rachel:** The student support team is collectively monitoring the safety and wellbeing of all of our students. We're being supported by the academic support team, and we've divided up the students and the teachers making teachers case managers. The case manager is overseeing the academic progress and is monitoring the engagement or lack of engagement that the student is responding or not responding to a teacher.

**Nick:** With the caseloads established to the [00:07:00] support and academically it tracks each student's progress and needs.

**Rachel:** We are meeting daily, multiple times a day to discuss student issues as they come up and the spreadsheet is monitored live. Some students are changing colors throughout the day. It's fairly fluid. We're doing that through phone calls, texting, social media as well as the food delivery touchpoints.

**Nick:** Within a single spreadsheet, each student [00:07:30] is color-coded green, yellow, or red based on their engagement or level of support they need. From there, staff can work together to re-strategize for a student or make sure a student gets the exact type of support they need. Despite having to pivot towards a completely remote model, not only are students receiving the immediate supports they need, but many are actually still making academic progress.

**Josh:** The amazing thing about having a model like Map Academy, where it is a blended asynchronous approach to high school, kids [00:08:00] are making real progress toward their graduation in the classes that they were already working on. It's definitely a curveball where we're doing this all remotely, but the kids know it, that they are making progress toward graduation and it isn't just an enrichment activity.

**Nick:** It is a big change for the school, but things are going pretty well.

**Rachel:** I think the kids are definitely feeling supported. The feedback is super good from the families and the kids. The systems that we've put in place as a whole in terms of [00:08:30] how we're outreaching to students and their families and crossing over with the academic support and the emotional support, the use of Google classroom and having virtual lessons like that, it's been pretty remarkable.

**Nick:** Despite how well it's going, there's no doubt at Map Academy that Rachel and Josh and the whole staff would much rather have their students back in the building. Even the students want to get back in the building to be with their friends and mentors **[00:09:00]** and teachers. Stay tuned next week and we'll be back to talk about how Map continues to evolve their response, to provide emotional support throughout this crisis.

For now, this has been a special edition of *Education Disruption*. If you want to see some tools mentioned in this episode, visit the [themapacademy.org/virtual-student-center](https://themapacademy.org/virtual-student-center). If you enjoyed this episode, please consider giving us a rating and subscribe for more episodes about how a school **[00:09:30]** like Map Academy is disrupting the traditional educational model. My name is Nick Tetrault **[00:09:35]**. Our executive producer is Kristen Hughes, and this is a Hairpin production.

**Josh:** Hello, this is Josh, co-founder of Map Academy. If you or someone works in education or youth development and wants to make a difference, check out our website at [themapacademy.org](https://themapacademy.org) for current openings, **[00:10:00]** a staff referral program, and a form you can use if there isn't a listing that matches what you do. We need talented teachers and youth development professionals that are ready to do high school differently and be there for students who need them the most. Thanks for listening. **[00:10:22]**

**[00:10:23] [END OF AUDIO]**