



MAP ACADEMY

**Education Disruption Podcast / 4.16.2020**

**[Episode 13: Academic Progress Continues](#)**

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**Nick:** [00:00:00] Map Academy has been closed for four weeks due to the COVID-19 crisis. In previous episodes, we heard how quickly they pivoted to remote learning and adapted their wraparound supports to continue to serve students and families. Today, we check in to see how staff is adapting, and academic progress is continuing.

**Shawn:** At Map—

**Nick:** Shawn is a humanities and special education teacher.

**Shawn:** The whole organization is built on the ability to adapt and to be [00:00:30] creative and to meet the needs of kids where they're at, in school, and away from school. Map is in the unique situation where we've done a lot of proactive work that prepares us for this time of crisis.

**Yvonne:** I think part of why it has been so successful with academic engagement is being flexible.

**Nick:** That's Yvonne, also a humanities teacher at Map.

**Yvonne:** And realizing that this is a weird time, there's a lot of anxieties going on around with [00:01:00] families, being stuck in the house with their family. We're not sure about who's unemployed in the house, if times are tough, if there's food. All of those necessities need to be taken care of first, again, before we can talk about learning or thinking. It allows us to be able to check in, create that environment where we still are able to care for the students, and then as that moves along, it naturally progresses into academic talk.

**Nick:** That natural [00:01:30] progression comes with a delicate balance.

**Shawn:** The biggest thing that I guess that my mind is on right now is how to be very strategic about our engagement with students. On the one hand, you want to reach out constantly because you want to help them in any way that you can, really. Trying to find that balance of, listen, we want to make sure that you're supported, and we can help you, but we don't want to overwhelm you with emails and texts and phone calls and all that kind of stuff.

**Yvonne:** We want to engage, but we don't want to push away [00:02:00] and overwhelm.

**Shawn:** Working with Josh and Rachel on the leadership team, they're always very strategic about what they do. For every student, systematically, looking at every student, what are the distance learning accommodations that they need? Do they still like paper and pencil? Then we're going to drop it off at their house.

**Yvonne:** That's part of the holistic approach that Map takes. We need to go through the layers of what could possibly be preventing them from achieving academic success.

**Nick:** The teachers at Map have to adapt to this new [00:02:30] situation and how it's affecting their students.

**Shawn:** Students are having a hard time keeping a routine. If they're waking up later, and then staying up later, one of the things that we've been brainstorming is how do we adapt the academic model to support that? Should we be working with students at seven o'clock at night? We need active feedback from all of our students so that we can keep fine-tuning the process as we go.

**Nick:** From leadership on down to the teachers, at Map, they're constantly [00:03:00] thinking about strategies for individual students and how to engage them academically.

**Shawn:** I feel like Rachel and Josh at Map Academy that's very, very important to them, that they listen carefully to kids and that they deliver what they need, even for the small things. If I notice a student likes Lil Peep, then I'm going to watch the documentary on Lil Peep and I'm going to present some writing prompts about Lil Peep and the likelihood of them following through with the assignment really increases.

**Nick:** For some students, this new remote learning environment [00:03:30] isn't slowing them down.

**Yvonne:** I have one student, he actually did not start at the beginning of the school year. He came in midway through the school year and he just hit the ground running. This closure has not stopped him at all. He just completed his US 2 credit. He finished it. He was doing two, three tasks a day, reaching out, Google Meets with videos. He was texting if you needed it. I was [00:04:00] so impressed with him.

**Shawn:** Another student last night, this is at 4:00 in the morning, submitted a short story that honestly I cried a little bit when I read it. It was a powerful short story about a zombie apocalypse, which on the surface seems a little goofy, but actually it was a really powerful short story. That's the kind of stuff that the student who wrote the story, I know that he had gone through a difficult time recently. [00:04:30] He had done some powerful writing in the past, but he's taken like a month or two off. For that to be the first piece that he submits and yesterday I spoke to him at his house because I was dropping some food off, and it all came together in a powerful way, I think.

**Nick:** The connection doesn't always have to be made through a specific assignment or even directly through academic progress. Map connects with students through their interests and amplifies their strengths. Marcy, the science and special education teacher tells me about a [00:05:00] student who used to take a lot of pride in taking care of Map's plants.

**Marcy:** She actually cares for all of our plants around. She actually goes and trims them, waters them, cares for them. She's like the caretaker. I was like, "I can't have these plants be sitting here without anybody to care for them." Shawn got in contact with her and she said she would like to take the plants home.

**Shawn:** Again, that's one of those things that most people would say, "Well, how do plants play a role in a school?" For some kids, plants are a [00:05:30] major part of their self-care routine. They love taking care of plants. They love gardens. They love planting seeds. They love being outside. We reached out to students who are interested in those things and literally delivering plants to them. If that's what's going to help a student with their self-care and help them relax and give them meaningful things to do during this difficult time, then that's really important to us.

**Marcy:** I think it was super helpful for her to have something like you said, to take her mind off the craziness and have some plants [00:06:00] to look at.

**Shawn:** That's one of the unique things about Map Academy—we're often dealing with students who are going through a struggle. Struggle is different for each student but oftentimes Map Academy students either have recently gone through a struggle, or are in the midst of a struggle, or sometime in their childhood, there was a struggle. It's a common theme for us, overcoming struggle and how to rise above adversity.

**Nick:** Map makes every effort to keep their students [00:06:30] engaged and supported. Marcy tells us about another student she has that has a very particular way of engaging with academics.

**Marcy:** He puts together Legos that I have run out of for him. Because of everything, I couldn't bring any more in. I work with him every day and he's struggling because he's so used to the routine. We would put together some Legos and he would go back to academics, then some more Legos. I reached out to Lego and I said, "Look, I have this student that loves Legos. I know this is rare circumstances, is there anything [00:07:00] you can do for me?" Gave them a little background.

I said, "This student really has a lot of anxiety going to school and working through his day." I got an email back today that they're sending something to my house, that then I can give to Lance to drop off at his house, because I think it'll help him greatly to just keep in his routine.

**Shawn:** I think those are the little things that ultimately over time will really pay off in the long run for students. If we can fight some of those small battles, and keep that engagement and the relationship going, [00:07:30] their learning, the subtle changes that we make with the learning because we're listening very carefully.

**Yvonne:** My heart is full. Now over almost a month of being out of school, they're reaching out to me being like, "I need to get stuff done. Where do I start?" That's literally music to a teacher's ears.

**Shawn:** It heightens our mission. It really brings to the surface, we're trying to teach skills about resilience and hope and redemption and all that stuff. A lot of our kids are in a [00:08:00] struggle right now. It just makes it that much more critical when a student is in a struggle.

**Yvonne:** I had a mini-lesson last night with a student. It was like 8:30 at night, and we were talking and he was like, "Do you think we're going to be able to go back to school?" I was like, "Honestly, I don't know." This student is so funny. He's like, "I don't care." He's like, "I'll go to summer school. I don't want to not be there." It's scary. They're pleased that they were able to come and decompress, talk it out, have a few laughs but [00:08:30] know that they're safe is taken away. Where I'm doing everything in my power to maintain that connection with them, I'm so proud of the students for advocating for themselves, because otherwise, we wouldn't know.

Usually, we use our nonverbal communication skills to see that something's not right. When the students are actually reaching out and saying, "Listen, I need help", it means that they trust us and it means that they are being vulnerable and that they know that we will do anything within our power to help them.

**Marcy:** Of all the [00:09:00] kids I talk to, I reached out to another student say, "Hey, do have so-and-so's cell phone? I can't get a hold of them." "Sure, let me send it to you." It's been a good team collaborative effort all around the students, staff, I feel, to be honest with you.

**Yvonne:** I think just making sure that communication is transparent and fluid on both sides helps ease the anxiety but also make sure that students are held accountable, teachers are held accountable, and the parents that are willing to help support [00:09:30] us are able to feel like they're also helping their kids.

**Nick:** It's definitely worth noting that to be able to provide this level of support, the staff and the leaders at Map need to be supported themselves. Among the staff, there's this culture of taking care of each other, getting work done, but also learning from each other.

**Shawn:** We're constantly looking to other teachers—they're talking together and then we're talking with the leads.

**Yvonne:** That's the nature of Map. It feels like a family.

**Marcy:** Well, it's super important for me to be here [00:10:00] to help facilitate what they need when those others can't be here. Seeing the food for everybody, make sure that goes out, seeing all the academic stuff get out. If there's anything else that people need, that I can be here to help facilitate. I think it's just super important. It's not the same.

**Nick:** Though the techniques that Map is developing over this crisis are not a replacement for the original learning model, but they are adding tools to the toolbox that will benefit students and teachers long after this crisis is over.

**Yvonne:** This has given us the time and [00:10:30] the opportunity as educators and as an organization to create things that make it easier for students to do things at their own pace. I think this closure has forced us to be as accessible as possible to as many people as possible and that just follows our model.

**Marcy:** Rachel and Josh and everybody's just been... I think it's brought the collective team together more because we're just constantly [00:11:00] brainstorming and being together and whatnot. I think it just made the community stronger as a whole.

**Shawn:** People shouldn't be surprised when organizations like ours, Map Academy is going to lead the way in how to rise above adversity because it's our foundation. It's our mission. It's what we do. We help students on an individual basis overcome adversity. As an organization, these guys are working around the clock, doing research. We're ripping into numbers and we're brainstorming and [00:11:30] we're doing all the things you have to do to adapt to a difficult time, trying to model for students what we do as an organization and that's why I love being there.

**Nick:** This has been a special edition of *Education Disruption*. Next week, we'll be talking about the future. What did co-founders Rachel and Josh learn from this pivot during the pandemic and [00:12:00] how will it affect the learning model going forward? If you enjoyed this episode, please

consider giving us a rating and subscribe for more episodes about how a school like Map is disrupting the traditional model of education. My name is Nick Tetrault. Our executive producer is Kristen Hughes, and this is a Hairpin production.

**Josh:** This is Josh, co-founder of Map Academy. If you or someone you know works in education or youth development and wants to make a difference, check out our website at [themapacademy.org](https://themapacademy.org) [00:12:30] for current openings, 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.

**[00:12:51] [END OF AUDIO]**