



MAP ACADEMY

Education Disruption Podcast / 5.5.2020

[Episode 14: Moving Forward](#)

educationdisruption.org

Nick: [00:00:00] Welcome back to a special edition of *Education Disruption*. In previous episodes, we heard how Map Academy quickly made the pivot to remote learning, how staff rallied to provide wraparound support students and families count on, and how academic progress continues during the COVID 19 crisis. Governor Baker of Massachusetts just announced that schools will remain closed for the rest of the school year.

Rachel: Hey guys, [00:00:30] the governor just announced that we can't reopen schools for the rest of the school year, which we were expecting, but it's still sad. All of us wish that we could have things go back to normal. Eventually, they will go back to normal. They're all saying, "Hi." Hi you guys.

Nick: We wanted to know how staff and students were holding up under the strain of so much uncertainty.

Rachel: Kids just want to [00:01:00] be back. That part's hard.

Josh: We can see it in our students. We can see it in our staff. We can see it in our families. For our student population, in particular, it is tremendously hard.

Nick: Map serves students that traditional school didn't work for, for a variety of reasons: mental health, homelessness, having to work to support their families, returning to school after dropping out.

Josh: The student support is incredibly busy right now. This pandemic is, [00:01:30] literally, spiraling some students' lives out of control. We're trying to do what we can, remotely, to ensure that they're okay.

Staff Member 1: At Map, you will still be held to the highest of standards, both academically and emotionally.

Staff Member 2: At Map, you can still engage with staff, personalize your learning, and make positive progress towards your future.

Staff Member 3: We're in here to make you smile, laugh, and engage with work. You can do this. Believe in yourself. We all do.

Staff Member 4: Even though we can't be [00:02:00] present in person right now, know that we are still here for you. Reach out if you need anything. We will all get through this together.

Staff Member 5: Be healthy when letting out all the emotions and feelings of sadness, frustration, anxiety. Try to remain optimistic. There's still a bright future ahead for all of you. I'm really excited to see it. See you soon.

Rachel: Even in this situation, it's been even more important for us to think really strategically about what changes we're making, and how we're [00:02:30] adjusting. If the fall still has to look different, and they can keep going. If-if-if. We are still, mostly, staying on a course that feels secure to people.

Josh: It has been our steadfast mission, from the beginning of this closure, to make sure that our kids still felt connected to Map.

Nick: Map Academy's model was created to remove barriers to learning. It challenges the traditional thinking of four walls, time, ranking, complying, and competing. [00:03:00] They believe all students can succeed with the right supports, at their own pace, anywhere. As this crisis drags on, schools struggle across the globe to continue to educate their students. There's only more disruption to come.

Josh: This pandemic has forced school leaders across the world to disrupt what traditional education looks like. How can we take advantage of things that we're putting into place right now that can just make us a better organization for the long run?

Rachel: You have to start really adopting the [00:03:30] mindset that you're going to embark on that change. Not the mindset that we just need things to go back to normal.

Josh: Some things about education just need to fundamentally change. We are working towards that. We're taking the opportunity to make changes to our school. We have the ability to be change agents.

Nick: Rachel and Josh are fully aware of this unique situation of being a new charter school, which means they have the flexibility and autonomy to experiment. Make decisions [00:04:00] and implement changes quickly. Despite the chaos of this forced closure, it's given them unexpected time to reflect, prepare, and plan.

Josh: It's really given us the opportunity, both as the leaders of Map Academy and just school leaders, to take a 40,000 foot view of education. It's given us the opportunity to take a step back and think about what works in schools, in general, and what, fundamentally, it needs to change.

Map Academy, [00:04:30] at times, feels like we're building the plane as we're flying it. This scenario is no different. I think that actually gives us an advantage. Do we want to shift into remote education during a pandemic? Absolutely not. That living in ambiguity and being open to change is huge.

Rachel: We definitely have been able to leverage things about our circumstance as a new school, a charter school. There's so many [00:05:00] things that work in our favor. There is no school leader anywhere who has a script for how to do this. There's no linear path to how to lead in this environment. There's a lot of things that allow us to almost be that lab school that can take that learning. Then make decisions, and execute changes, way faster and way easier.

Nick: As schools [00:05:30] across the country grapple with switching to remote learning, the models tend to be built on traditional schedules and expectations. Map's approach is different. Since the beginning, Map has embraced innovation, creativity, and iteration. This crisis made that rapid expansion of systems and tools even more necessary. It also revealed some new ways to engage.

Rachel: Our students need us to keep working on strengthening our instructional techniques [00:06:00] in order to engage them with the high quality academics that they need. In person, it's very tempting in youth development, to just help the kid through that math problem, or help the kid through that. It put the cognitive lift, which should be on the kid, on the adult. In this remote setting, it's much harder for adults to do that. We have to be really creative about how we provide that help.

Josh: We've made a commitment to really [00:06:30] quarterbacking the kids' educational journey and reaching out to the kid. Trying to support them through. Are we hitting 100%? Absolutely not. Are there a lot of academic gains being made? Absolutely.

Rachel: I think we've learned a lot about tracking interventions and tracking what we're doing, so that we're not doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results.

Nick: Map was already slated to expand [00:07:00] with construction starting before the school closed. They're fully enrolled with a long waitlist. Growth always involves some uncertainty. Growing in the midst of a pandemic has brought the need into high relief for Map.

Rachel: It's the most energizing thing to think about the fact that we have this amazing renovation going on. That it's going to allow us to help more kids and to engage in different types of programming. We know that our students need us now. The demand [00:07:30] is only going to continue to increase for schools like ours as this situation continues to unfold.

The struggle is real. In some ways, one of the hardest parts about this whole shutdown has been the reality of how desperately we need to keep finding adults that are really cut out for this. Adults that really, truly, get our mission and are willing to do whatever [00:08:00] it takes to make it work.

Josh: We want the people who want to disrupt the status quo, who want to push the envelope of what education can look like. Those are the people we want.

Rachel: Crises bring that out. Crises bring out the are you really willing to do what it takes? We need more people who have that talent/drive/ [00:08:30] mindset to be able to execute this really hard work.

Josh: I think it's important to note, we absolutely do not have everything figured out. I think, though, a tremendous amount of room to improve. One thing we have nailed is to look to the future, and to see how we can use this pause to make Map Academy a better educational institution for the long run.

That, I can say with [00:09:00] confidence, as one of the founders of the school, that Rachel and I have taken this opportunity to really take stock in what is working in education and what is not. How can we capitalize on this time period to make some really big changes?

Rachel: No one would have ever chosen to have a pandemic. I can't wait to be back. I can't wait to have people back here. We will be changed as a result of having gone through this, for the better. **[00:09:30]**

Nick: Stay tuned and expect to hear more stories from us, including stories from students who found their way to Map Academy. If you enjoyed this podcast, please leave us a rating and let us know what you think. If you know a teacher or a youth development professional, who's currently frustrated by the system, tell them to check out themapacademy.org. My name is Nick Tetrault. Our executive producer is Kristen Hughes and this has been a Hairpin production. **[00:10:00]**