INTERVIEW RESPONDENT NUMBER: T006
GRADE TEACHING: 1st Grade
SCHOOL CI SCORE: 0.36
% STUDENT ON F/R LUNCH: 90.17%
TRANSCRIBER'S LAST NAME: Evans

This interview was held on March 4, 2021 at 7:00pm over Zoom.

Interviewer: Okay, so why did you decide to become a teacher?

Respondent: Uh..so my entire family are currently teachers..um mom, dad, and then my older brother before me became a teacher and then my sister became a teacher. I was undecided at first. I thought maybe I would want to do forensics, but then I was like nah not for me, so I turned to math. Let me do some math, you know, I love math but I don't know what I would do with math, so why not *teach* math?

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: So then, like, I just had the best voluntary experience of my life. I volunteered for my, well she was my sixth grade teacher but she was teaching kindergarten at the time, and I volunteered in her classroom and thought "Yeah this is perfect." And then, I happened to get a first grade job, and I was like "This is even better than kindergarten!"

Interviewer: How long have you been teaching?

Respondent: Goodness, this year marks nine.

Interviewer: Wow, so a long time.

Respondent: Oh eight years, sorry eight years. Yeah.

Interviewer: Gotcha, have you always taught at this school?

Respondent: No, so this is my fifth year here. I taught three years in Pennsylvania.

Interviewer: Okay, have you always taught this grade?

Respondent: No, so my first two years were Pre-K, and then I did a reading specialist for grades K-2 for one year, and then I took a first grade position at my current school, and I've been there for the last five years.

Interviewer: So, what do you enjoy most about teaching in general, and then specifically teaching this grade?

Respondent: In general, I just love interacting with my students. Like you just learn so much about a six and seven year old that you would never imagine is possible. All of their experiences at only such a young age is just really really cool to get to interact with. Um, and then first grade I love because I'm basically responsible for teaching them how to read. So, I feel like it's a lot of pressure but it's also really rewarding, like when they leave they're reading books. So, I feel like they come in with letters and they leave with words, and that's really rewarding.

Interviewer: Yeah definitely. So, can you just tell me a little bit about your experience teaching this academic year specifically?

Respondent: Uh sure. So, number one word is that it's challenging! It's not [pause] It's not what I went to school for. It's not something that I was prepared for. It has been… It took all of my teaching that I'm used to and said "Alright, now do everything but all on a computer." And, it's when, you know you don't have anyone to really talk to. It's just a screen, so it's really difficult.

Interviewer: Are you completely virtual right now or hybrid?

Respondent: Nope, I am completely virtual.

Interviewer: And have you been virtual this whole time?

Respondent: [nods] Yes.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me a little bit about how at the drop of a hat you had to switch your instruction?

Respondent: Yeah. It was really tough. So, whenever they cancelled last year, when it was March, they were like "Okay, so now no one's coming back to school. You're going to start doing everything virtually." Like, okay? What is that? Like what does that look like? No one could really give us an answer, so we basically had to meet as a team and be like "Alright first grade team, this is what we're going to try to get our kids to do on a computer screen. And it's just, it's tough because the number one problem with our school and just with our population is resources. And if they don't have paper and pencil, I can't get them to write. If they don't have books at home, I can't ask them to go read something. So, I have to hand deliver everything to them and it has to be electronic, and the second issue with that is they're six years old. So, now I'm asking a six year old to do computer savvy work that even I was unfamiliar with. So it was just really tough to do.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that you had to work collaboratively as a team. Is that something that you've maintained throughout the year or was that more of a resource at the beginning?

Respondent: Nope, it's still a team thing. Half of our.. We have eight first year teachers. Four of us teach in person. Four of us teach virtually. So all eight of us meet, we meet twice a week, and then we split into our groups of four and we meet like another one to two times a week. And that's where we do all of our planning, like what sort of digital resources are we gonna use, for myself and virtual team, and then what materials can they use physically in a classroom?

Interviewer: And has that type of collaboration been a new thing with COVID or was that consistent pre-pandemic?

Respondent: We did that pre-pandemic. We met… Every year that I've ever worked there, we've met three times a week. Um, because we always meet once as a reading team, once as a math team, and then one other time to basically be like "Okay, what are we really going to do?"

Interviewer: Gotcha, so we were just talking about, you know, modifying instruction and everything, but in terms of curriculum, how have you been able to adapt that? Or have you had to even adapt it?

Respondent: Oh yeah, big time! So, with this year, our school district has cut down the standards to just what they're calling the "power standards." I don't know if you've heard that term or not, but basically they are focused heavy on what will they need to know to get to next year. Right? So, there's a lot of extra pieces here that we'll teach them and help them get through their entire schooling, but number one goal is make sure they know how to read and make sure they know how to use number sense. Like, if I do that as a first grade teacher, that would be a huge success for me this year. They're the two biggest things we're working on. So, curriculum has changed quite a bit.

Interviewer: That's crazy! When you have to focus specifically on those power standards, have you had to modify or get rid of some of your favorite lessons that you know the kids really respond to?

Respondent: Yep! Science is uh, We just this week- No today! We just planned a science lesson for next week. We haven't done science this entire third quarter. It's not in the power standards. Our students have literally said to us "All we're doing is reading and math. Can we please do something different?" And myself and the rest of the team are like "Yeah! Let's get a science lesson in there. We'll tie it in to reading, but at least it's something different than the last four weeks."

Interviewer: Is science the only subject that has suffered?

Respondent: Social studies.

Interviewer: Social studies as well?

Respondent: Yeah. We get to tie it in to our reading, but we don't- I don't get to teach people, so it's like when we had our Martin Luther King lesson it was about him but taught through text only and I wasn't assessing them on their knowledge of Martin Luther King. I was assessing them on their ability to read a small passage. So, it's like they're still getting *some* of the concept, but it's not falling on a grade. It's falling on the fact that they read.

Interviewer: And does that change your process as a teacher, when it comes to formulating lesson plans?

Respondent: Big time. I don't- Well, normally we would get thirty to forty-five minutes to teach the person, but now I'm like "Okay in my entire thirty minutes of reading, I'm only going to teach this guy for maybe ten minutes and spend the next twenty minutes teaching them how to read the sentences. So, it's more of skills-based reading with a *little* bit of knowledge sprinkled in.

Interviewer: How do you keep your kids focused during times like this? Especially as a first grade teacher. Like you said, they're only six years old.

Respondent: Movement. Movement, movement, movement. I play music all the time! Just something in the background that they can hear while we're working. We get up. We do a lot of movement, a lot of activities to help with the learning, just because their bodies get so tired.

Interviewer: Can you describe an example of one of those activities?

Respondent: Absolutely! So, our sight words, our spelling words, every day that we do our spelling words review, it's always something active. We're getting up we're acting out the letters while we're spelling the word. I just get them up from their computer, from sitting down or even laying down a lot of the times, um to actually be moving and being engaged. Spelling is the easiest one to do an active lesson.

Interviewer: Gotcha. In your classrooms of the teachers that aren't virtual, is it the same approach? Or is it primarily for virtual students?

Respondent: I'd say it's more of a virtual thing, because I know in person, there are limitations on how much movement they can really have to be able to stick to safety guidelines with social distancing and everything. They have the kids spaced out, but it's hard to keep them spaced out if they're moving around the room. I know that they get brain breaks, and they get to do GoNoodles and things like that, but in previous years, we would do writing around the room where they would be in groups and walk around to find letters. That kind of stuff went out the window as soon as social distancing came in.

Interviewer: Has there been a way to replicate that kind of collaboration and group work in a virtual setting?

Respondent: Not that I've seen. Um, it's just that they have to be spaced out and they can't share their materials, so as soon as they get into their guided reading groups, they have their own book and are far apart. Where normally, I would say "Okay, you two work together to find these words." Now, it's kind of just like "Hey! The word is 'the.'" There's just no way for them to push it together, they just have to kind of talk far away from each other.

Interviewer: In your classroom, a virtual setting, is everyone mostly in the same like realm, the same room, while you're talking or are you able to do things like breakout rooms?

Respondent: Yeah, so we do whole group three times a day and then the rest of the time is small group instruction. So, we still do guided reading, where I'll have four to six kids at a time. We do an intervention group. I do a uh, another small group where we work on our basic PAL words, and then we do whole group math and three small groups of math.

Interviewer: Can you describe what those small groups look like? What the format is?

Respondent: Sure, so small group reading is exactly what I would do if I were in the building with my students in front of me. We work on their level in text. It hasn't really changed. The only thing that has changed is that it's digital now and it's harder now, because I have to project the book as opposed to reading their own copy. They can technically have their own copy, but according to what their level is, they can't manipulate the digital text. I do have a higher group that can, so when it's their turn, I just send them the book. We open it up and read it on our own time. I can check in on them while they're reading to see where they're at. They tell me what page they're on and can come in and read to me… They're a little more tech savvy, so they get a little bit more independence with it.

Interviewer: And we've talked a lot about the negative aspects that come from COVID, but what is the biggest success you've had teaching during the pandemic?

Respondent: Um, parents saying that their students' behavior has been a positive. So, I have a couple of students who last year really struggled being in person. Moms were saying, "All they want to do is play. All they want to do is entertain their friends," and are now saying "Their behavior has completely changed! He's sitting in front of the computer, he's listening, because there's really not a way for them to be like a class clown, because I have total control over when they can talk, so if they start to say something it's like "Alright, mute [pretending to push a button]" It's a bummer for them, because they can't interrupt even if they want to. The nice thing for that is that it's maintained behavioral expectations.

Interviewer: That's nice to have a success in the midst of so much craziness.

Respondent: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: What unique challenges do your students face with online teaching and learning?

Respondent: Um, internet issues are a big one. Just the fact that i'll get a message halfway through the day, at least twelve times a week, saying "Internet's not working" or "Internet's down" and it's like "Okay… I'm really sorry it crashed but I can't fix that." It could be until the next day until it gets fixed and it even could be a situation where they need to get a new Chromebook, so then that's another two days. I can still "send home work" but how do they do it if they don't have internet or their Chromebook? So, the issue is that technology aspect and computers are a big one. We're really thankful to have so many computers that can be given out, but they still crash.

Interviewer: So, what would the typical process be for a student who does say "Hey, my internet is out…?" How do you help in that scenario?

Respondent: I get to send home work to them, and I get to send a form as well for the parent to say "Yes, we're having technology issues," and if they have chronic internet issues. Our school has wireless hotspots that they are able to give out to those families, so that helps them with that. Even if a computer is crashed, like completely crashed, I can send home work that a parent can get them to do on their phone.

Interviewer: And how do you send them work?

Respondent: Um, Class Dojo and through Canvas. Class Dojo is better, because it goes directly to the parent and the parent is normally better at getting it opened. I can also send things through Canvas, but they can't access Canvas if they don't have a Chromebook, as where with Class Dojo it just goes directly to the cellphone, so they can just click the links and play the games that have the educational aspect, something they can do without a computer and internet issues.

Interviewer: And is Class Dojo an application that was newly implemented this year or..?

Respondent: No, we've been using Class Dojo for the last four years? Three or four years. Um, it's a really good communication tool. It's basically texting for parents and teachers. I can put class letters up there, all my information, all my updates. I can put a homework assignment up there, so even if a kid can't find it on Canvas it's on Class Dojo for the parent to open up. It's just a really nice way to talk back and forth.

Interviewer: And outside of the unavoidable problems with the Internet that your students face, what have been some challenges they have experienced during the pandemic?

Respondent: Um, my own user error. Just because I am also kinda new to this whole Google Slides…. because I haven't really needed to use them. I prefer to use tangible objects in school as opposed to digital artifacts. So me making mistakes often and being like "Alright hold on, let me fix this. I gotta make it a copy, make you an editor." It's like, things like that happen and it just throws us off for a minute, but then we're able to get back to it and complete it. Today, for example, I forgot to share it as "Anyone can click it" so everyone was just mashing the button saying "Mr. ***, we're locked out! We're locked out!" And I just had to say, "Hold on. Let me fix it."

Interviewer: And for those students who require more assistance, um, how have you been able to adapt instruction to accommodate that?

Respondent: So, the student's that need more help with the technology piece alone, instead of having to make a copy, share a link, and send it back, I just create a collaborative document and say "You get page two, you get page four, etc." and we're all working on it but everyone has their own slide.

Interviewer: For you, what has been the biggest challenge teaching this year so far?

Respondent: I think, with some of them, it would be the lack of presence. They might have logged in, but they turned their camera off, mic off, and you can holler their name for ten minutes and ain't nobody coming back. It's really frustrating because it's like, "I don't get to see you that often, so when I am seeing you I want you to be present." And that's the biggest issue I'm having. Some of them, there's nothing you can do, I mean you can talk to admin and they can call home but if they don't want to log on and talk, then they don't log on and talk.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you sorta have a lack of control over certain scenarios like that?

Respondent: Yeah. Big time! Especially if it's when home life isn't conducive to helping, it makes it nearly impossible to get anything out of them.

Interviewer: What would happen if it's a repeated issues you're dealing with with a student? Are there other ways of reaching them?

Respondent: Yeah. We have phone calls home from the administration team, so I just had to talk to them yesterday. I had a little student who just wouldn't do anything, who would show up with mic off, camera off, leave for lunch and then never come back. Lunch is at 11:00, so they believe their day is over at 11:00 and that's just like mm.. that's not school. They call home, they talked with mom and the next step would be a home visit. They would be like "Okay, well now we're going to go and check on them during the day. What are they doing? What are they supposed to be doing? There are steps. Luckily, it hasn't gotten that far but that is next on the list.

Interviewer: How have the demands of teaching in a pandemic affected your work-family balance?

Respondent: Um, I'd say work-family balance is going well. My wife is also a teacher, so the nice thing is that we get to collaborate. We get to bounce things off of each other, so that's been really nice since we're both new to the virtual teaching, I mean everybody is, so it's nice to have someone at home that understands the exact struggles that are going on right now.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Um, my little girl just loves to.. when I was working from home and she'd be here she'd be like "Daddy, I want to see your computer. I want to teach." It's like "No, you can't."

Interviewer: You said when you *were* working from home, so do you do virtual school but in your classroom?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And how do you think that has changed your approach or your experience?

Respondent: It's been the same, because I don't even have my own classroom. Because I was virtual, I gave up my classroom so that way another first grade teacher that's in person could have a room, so I am currently working in..a… storage closet? We'll call it? Um, it's "kind of an office" but you know it is what I need to be able to teach virtually.

Interviewer: So, did you have to take your materials and everything out of your classroom or was it all able to be in there?

Respondent: It was all left in there for the teacher that was taking over.

Interviewer: Gotcha. Last spring when the pandemic began, obviously schools had to rapidly shift to online teaching. Can you describe that transition from in person teaching to the emergency shift to remote teaching?

Respondent: Yeah, uh pure chaos. Absolute 100% chaos. Everyone was just scrambling! We were given like a couple days to meet with our instructional designer to make a Canvas page, to be able to send home work. We were like "We've never used Canvas before." Being in first grade, like the uppers use Canvas because it makes sense for them since those kids had Chromebooks already.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: So, they were already familiar with Canvas, but they gave us a bunch of six year olds and said "Alright, teach them how to use a computer" and we were like "We don't even have computer class this year!" They've had no experience with a computer. It was just chaos, and the lack of participation from students was astonishing.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Like, we would have weekly check-ins where I would host a video every week for lunch, just like "Hey, come eat with me, it's not even about schoolwork. It's just a check-in to say hi and come see me" I would have like three kids. It's just like "Wow!" And that's when I had eighteen kids in my class, so it was three of eighteen.

Interviewer: Wow. In those weekly check-ins, was that your idea or was that a widespread thing?

Respondent: It was a widespread thing. We were all just checking in. Um, we would also do whole grade days, where we would all get together and the teachers would do something special like read a book, play a game, do an activity, and those.. Gosh! Out of 140ish students, we would get like 20.

Interviewer: Mmm.

Respondent: Out of all classrooms, so there was a really big lack of participation in classes last year.

Interviewer: When your students would come to those weekly check-ins, what was the most common topic that they would bring up outside of academics?

Respondent: Just missing being in person, me reading them stories, missing their friends. Um, they just really wanted to be around people. They didn't really understand what was going on, so all of a sudden they're just like "Alright, you're out of school!" and they were left just saying "But why?" It's hard to explain that to a six year old or seven year old.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel as a teacher?

Respondent: Crummy, like it was really sweet that they missed me and missed being in school, but it was like.. Watching one of my little girls cry because she wasn't in school anymore was really heartbreaking.

Interviewer: How would you respond to try and help with their confusion?

Respondent: Well, she got extra meetings with me. She was at literally every single one of them. She was the only one who went to every single one of them, so I would reach out to her more often because she actually participated. It was really nice, and the family life there was great! They always, like, checked in with me through Class Dojo, so she got a little more attention because she wanted it and was asking for it.

Interviewer: You said your administration kinda through you guys into emergency teaching over a very short time span. How do you think your administration has helped in your transition to virtual teaching?

Respondent: They.. They definitely gave us a lot of guidelines. They basically told the instructional designer "Hey, get them what they need. We can work on the pretty stuff later." We got.. It wasn't pretty. What we had wasn't pretty, but it was everything we needed for our students in a very short amount of time.

Interviewer: Has that been consistent from last Spring to now?

Respondent: They've expected more out of us, out of our Canvas pages, which is reasonable because we've been given more time and more training, but they still really let us have our space. They're not breathing down our necks. They're not checking our pages. They're making sure our kids are learning, that our kids are coming to school, and they're making sure that everyone has something that works for them.

Interviewer: You said you were provided trainings. Can you talk more about that?

Respondent: Yeah, so we just had our instructional designer come in and she would hold small group PD's, professional developments, which were really just focused on the problems we were having. Instead of giving us these broad topics of all the things it can do, we were able to say "Let's focus on what we need to do. Let's do that first." so we did really focused professional development last year. Over the summer, we were given the more broad professional development, because we were able to finally focus on what Canvas could do not just what we needed it to do.

Interviewer: Have those trainings continued or was it mostly just at the beginning?

Respondent: Mostly at the beginning. Now that we've gotten the overview, we can still schedule time with our instructional designer any time we want… but luckily three out of the four of us are pretty tech savvy, so now that we're more used to it we can bounce ideas off of each other instead to figure out things and not have to meet with her. Whenever we have a question we just shoot her an email and she gets back to us with an answer.

Interviewer: So, in terms of communication, how do you feel your administration has handled it?

Respondent: Uh, I think really well. I think they're on our sides, um, in terms of communicating everything. They understand that this is something new! I can't say enough good things about my admin. Um, they're definitely the best admin I've ever worked for, and I'm not just saying that because this is an interview, like I truly do mean it. It is night and day compared to anything I've ever done with administration. They are always just in our corner, um no matter what the issue is. If we come to them with a problem, they have a solution for us. If a parent comes to them with a problem, they always come to us and ask "Hey, is this actually happening or is it just an upset parent?" It's never "I can't believe that this person said you did that!" it's always "What's going on? Let's talk about it. Alright? Cool." It's really nice that they don't… especially in this setting, because it's so easy to be like "Okay, this kid's not showing up. I don't know what to do." Instead, they say "Alright, we're gonna call. We're gonna check on him. We'll figure something out."

Interviewer: Right. Do you feel the same way about the school board for your district?

Respondent: Uh, not so much. I feel like the school board for **** is more about getting what they wanted and not what was best in general. So, I feel like they did… at the end of the day, they got what they wanted when clearly 60% of the population was still like "That's not what we think is in our best interest." Our school is probably split 65 virtual, 35 in person.

Interviewer: Gotcha.

Respondent: I don't know how common that is throughout the area, but our school clearly didn't get what we wanted. We just got what the school board said was good enough.

Interviewer: When you say the school board "got what they wanted," what are you referring to?

Respondent: Like, everybody back in school. Basically, allowing it to be a parent choice versus a school choice. They let all parents decide which type they wanted, and I feel like that was to appease a certain group of people and then basically just be like "Well, everyone else can still choose their own fate so…" I feel like it was sorta a power move to just be like "Nope! This is what we're doing," even though a bunch of things say you shouldn't.

Interviewer: Was there any kind of referral to teachers' opinions or any outreach to gauge the way you guys felt about the decision?

Respondent: Nope.

Interviewer: Not at all?

Respondent: No. I think there was one survey that said "Would you be comfortable coming back?" and then that was it.

Interviewer: You didn't hear any response back about that survey?

Respondent: Nope.

Interviewer: And for now, do you still receive communication from the school board about the future or about any upcoming changes?

Respondent: Not really, I mean it's pretty abrupt. For now, they're pretty much just riding it out until next year. They're maybe talking about having more virtual school next year, but that's just a thought. They don't have any clue of what's going to be happening in the near future.

Interviewer: As a teacher, how do you manage that level of uncertainty?

Respondent: I try not to stress too much about it, because I can't change it. So, it's like I'll show up when you want me to show up, and I'll teach on a computer when you want me to teach on the computer. I don't… I'm not here for the adults. I'm here for the kids and I'll do what's best for them. If I'm teaching to you on a computer, then I'll do my best to get my point across. If I'm

teaching in front of you, we're going to have an awesome time. If on a computer, we're going to make it work.

Interviewer: In your opinion, what do you feel is best for the students at this time?

Respondent: For the students at this time… For the students in a safety manner, virtual. For the students in an academic manner, you can't refute the evidence that in person teaching is better. I mean no one will say that virtual teaching is better across the board, because it's not. Especially at this age, it's just not. Is it best for the community to keep people safe? Absolutely, but now with the vaccine moving forward, we're getting a lot safer. If it's going to be in person teaching in September, it'll be more effective. I only get… each kid only gets two hours of face time with me right now, based on small group and whole group instruction. In person, they're still seeing the teacher for seven hours each day.

Interviewer: Have you seen a change in student response, being in a virtual setting from a classroom?

Respondent: Yeah, so I had some students that had gone to school in person and then came back to virtual. Um, one specifically, she definitely wants to be in person, but they couldn't make it work with the transportation issues, so she had to come to virtual. Her home life is really busy, she goes to a daycare center most of the time. It's really loud, so she struggles not only with listening to the babysitter, but also trying to listen to me. It's really hard for her, but then I have other kids that love it. They say "I can do this all day. I can do homework on a computer. I can do lesson slides. I love every second of it."

Interviewer: Has your approach to grading or delivering of assignments changed at all?

Respondent: Yeah, big time. It's all digital and that really hurts writing. It's like, when we do writing practice I have to be like "Okay. Hold it up to the camera!" And they're like [shoves hands extremely close to camera] jamming it up there. I can't see a single word, so they have to back it up. Just the problem of them knowing the spacial distance to have me grade something, makes their writing grade very hard. Then, when I give tests, I don't know who's taking the tests. It's assigned to them through Canvas. They take it, and I'm not there to watch them take it, so who really did it? You kinda have to believe it's the student, but you can't prove it one way or the other.

Interviewer: So, with writing specifically, how have you had to adjust those assignments since you're not able to see where they're struggling?

Respondent: Yeah, so a lot of it has become digital writing where they have to write in the Google Slides. I'm not really worried about letter formation at that point. I'm worried about spelling and capital letters, punctuation, just the conventions of writing, and less the actual handwriting.

Interviewer: How do you think that will affect them in the future?

Respondent: Uh, it'll be a big issue next year if they come back, when they come back to actual handwriting, because that's a big difference. It's a fine motor skill that they're lacking in right now. They're picking up other ones, like typing is a big one that they're picking up, but they're losing a lot of just writing letters.

Interviewer: Is there any kind of responsibility that you have to put on to the parent that you wouldn't normally?

Respondent: Yeah, so I've sent home I think twice this year, they're just handwriting books where it's literally just practice, like this is the letter 'A' now write it twenty times, this is the letter 'B' now write it twenty times, here's a sentence write it. It's me giving them those materials and then hoping they do them. I can stress the importance, but can't make them do anything. I have to trust the parent.

Interviewer: You said you have to trust that it's your student taking the test or completing the assignment, and that there's really no way for you to know for sure one way or the other. Have you had any challenges with that?

Respondent: Um, not bad! I feel like a lot of the tests I've given, I've been getting back fair feedback. Based on the student and where they're at and the test results, they're matching across the board. The only issues I've ever had with it… I had one student who, when they were doing their Alexia entrance test, definitely had some help. The problem with that is it gave him material that was way too hard for his level, so I reset his account, which was a really easy fix, but that's the only issue I have personally dealt with where it wasn't him doing the activity. Somebody had helped him to be like "Okay, you can do this! You're really smart. Let's do this together," and that's not really helping.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: That's giving them a really good starting point, but then they're floundering because the starting point is too high.

Interviewer: Shifting to post pandemic, obviously with the vaccines coming out, people are starting to be more hopeful for the future. How do you think the pandemic will change education in the future?

Respondent: I think my principal said it best, where it's not a one year problem, it's at least a five year problem. We might've been out of school for one year, but it's setting those kids back five years, just to catch them back from what they've missed in one full year of education… one full year of in person education.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Because my first graders are stepping into second grade, having not stepped foot in the building. They might not even come until second quarter. I don't know when they're coming back, but when they do come back… They left in March their kindergarten year. They had zero in person in first grade, and then x amount of missing time in second grade. For two years out of the room, that takes a toll on classroom behavior, on student engagement. It just kind of snowballs. It's going to take years to get that fixed.

Interviewer: How do you think teachers can combat that or will have to combat that?

Respondent: Uh, I really stress the importance to my families that this a team effort. I am here for them during the day and I can answer questions any time, but when it's the weekends, when it's homework time, I'm not there. I really stress it to them, it has to be us! It's not me teaching your child. It's us working together to make sure your child is getting the education that they deserve.

Interviewer: So what are your biggest concerns for students and teachers about returning to face to face learning after the pandemic, apart from the gaps or lack of knowledge about what it even means to be in a school?

Respondent: Uh, I'm gonna say behaviors are gonna be the issues at first. Just being back in the building, you know. They were five when they left and are coming back at seven and a half. Like, just the fact… What is school? What behaviors do they have to work through, because they've never been there? Or like, the kids that are in kindergarten this year have never been to school and are going to be in first grade, expected to have routines that have never been taught to them. I think the behavior is going to be our biggest struggle when we come back.

Interviewer: How do you approach that?

Respondent: It's going to be all teacher management, and it's gonna be like, um… You gotta be a firm teacher in the beginning, and they're gonna have to- well we're all going to have to be firm. They're going to be coming in brand new. They're just little kids who have never experienced school this way, right? It's going to be on the teacher to make sure they're on a strict regimen and that we're able to get them what they need at the beginning, so that way the rest of the year plays out nicely.

Interviewer: And is that different from the typical approach to behavioral management?

Respondent: Uh, for me that's very typical. Hard at first, but it just gets so much more fun if you listen, and I love it. That's the way it should be, but a lot of the times- well not a lot of the time, but ya know different teachers have different styles, where they want to be friends before they want to be the educator versus educator first and then when you start doing what you're supposed to do, game on! We're going to have fun.

Interviewer: What are the- or what is the benefit of being an educator first and friend after that?

Respondent: I think for me, it builds respect in my classroom because I push my kids. I push them hard, and they understand when I'm disappointed. They understand when I'm excited, so I think for me, it's "I'm gonna be a really good teacher to you right now. I may not be a good friend to you right now, but that comes as the year goes on.

Interviewer: Gotcha, and were you able to maintain that type of approach in a virtual setting?

Respondent: I would say I have. Um, my kids really know when I'm excited. I go all out! I'll wear different outfits, I'll scream and holler. We play music all the time, so it's like right now they're in that sweet spot of "We've gotten through and understand how to do this, now we're going to have fun."

Interviewer: Aw that's good. What outcomes of the educational experience during the pandemic do you believe might be beneficial for students and teachers going forward?

Respondent: Can you repeat that? My daughter was going up the stairs and I didn't quite catch it.

Interviewer: Yes! Um, basically just what outcomes of this experience might actually be beneficial for children and teachers going forward?

Respondent: I think this is going to open up a new wave of, um, just technology support and getting them more comfortable with that process, because like I said, we didn't have computer last year. These kids had no computer technology skills. Now, they're going to come into next

year with huge skills, and a lot of the SOLs will be computer based, so now they're going to be another step ahead of "This is what the test is going to look like. It's on a computer. I'm used to using a computer for tests." Now, it's not me talking them through the skills, it's me showing them what they know, so I think the technology piece is going to be our biggest boon. Especially, like, with me sending home homework next year. Even if they're in person, my kids lose paper all the time. They're six years old! They're going to throw it in the trash on accident, but if I can send it home digitally and the kid can do it on the Chromebook, we're all set. It's like, we'll have those options. It's not just going to be "Sorry you lost it. Here's a new one try again." It's going to be "Well I'm doing it at home, or I'm doing it on my Chromebook, so I can just send it to you again."

Interviewer: And you mentioned that you didn't have computer last year a couple of times. Why was that?

Respondent: Um, we switched from computer to STEAM.

Interviewer: And can you talk a little bit more about what that means?

Respondent: Yeah. So, normally when we had computer two years ago and even back then, the teacher was responsible for teaching them how to use a computer. It was literally "Here's what you do. Here's how you get to your applications. Here's how you type. Here's how you log in." All of that was specifically taught. Last year, they moved into STEAM, where they still use *some* technology skills but are applying their, um, math skills to it, science skills to it. They're kinda aiming for incorporating everything into one and not just specifically teaching how to use a computer.

Interviewer: Do you think that has benefited or kind of hindered the students?

Respondent: At this point, I would have loved to have my kindergarteners to have had computer class. Um, but I do definitely enjoy the benefits of having their learning through STEAM, mostly because myself- I would have done much better in a STEAM class than I would have in a computer class.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Because I love that kind of learning. It's very tangible to manipulate things, as opposed to just sitting there and saying "Alright, here are the home keys. Here's J. Here's K." Um, they get more knowledge but less specific computer skills.

Interviewer: Alright! Is there anything else you'd like to mention that we haven't discussed yet?

Respondent: Um… I don't think so.

Interviewer: No pressure!

Respondent: No, I think uh, [long pause] I mean I love when my parents get to do drive bys! We put on a couple of programs during the year, where parents can come pick up supplies. Just last Thursday, we had a, uh, relaunch to learning, where we got a bunch of school supplies, bagged them up. Parents could drive through, tell us what grade their kid was in, the kid could be in the car, and then the kid could get actual school supplies.

Interviewer: Wow.

Respondent: That was a um, really nice activity, both to be able to see my students again because I've only seen them… That makes it the second time I've seen them in person, once at the beginning of the year and once at the end, so it adds that layer of accountability I feel. Like "Aw Mr. *** is a real person, like he actually is at school." It made kids really excited, like "Yes! We've got school supplies again." I think it was really helpful.

Interviewer: Where did the um, school supplies come from? Was it provided to you or did you have to submit what you needed, or…?

Respondent: We put in what we wanted, and then throughout the different departments they were able to find what we needed. Specifically for first grade, we gave out unifix cubes, two colors and ten of each, so they could do patterns and number trains. We gave out our Treasures books that we read in class, but we're moving away from those anyways, so they're giving them out to students to keep.

Interviewer: Oh.

Respondent: Some laminated ten frames, some dice. Fake money. Just the things we normally would have used in an everyday classroom, they get to keep at home.

Interviewer: Do you incorporate those materials into your class in a virtual setting?

Respondent: For the five of my kids that picked them up.

Interviewer: Oh, so not every student came and got them.

Respondent: Nope. It was completely optional, and out of my fourteen, five of them came and got them.

Interviewer: Gotcha. So for you, how do you make up for the lack of materials they weren't able to get?

Respondent: We play the game "Go Find Something," where it's like "Alright, you need ten somethings… go get them! I don't care what they are. They can't be sharp and you need ten of them. Go!"

Interviewer: And that's a good way to get them to move as well?

Respondent: Right. We do a lot of scavenger hunts just to get them out of their seats. It still pertains to the subject, but they can't just sit there. Even as an adult, I can't just sit here.

Interviewer: Well… Anything else or do you think you've pretty much covered it?

Respondent: I think that one was a good ending point.

Interviewer: A nice, positive note to end on.

Respondent: Yeah.