

HERE TO STAY: INNOVATIONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

About this Exploration Lab

TOPIC Reflect on the challenges of the pandemic and subsequent successful innovations, as well as how to approach the work moving forward.

DATE 2/15/2022 **# OF PARTICIPANTS** 93 **LENGTH** 2 hours **FACILITATOR(S)** Dana Beck
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Exploration Labs are one of [NCCEP's strategies](#) to encourage the GEAR UP community to network, share, learn, and solve problems. Participants contribute ideas to crowdsource promising practices and potential solutions. The collective input of the group is synthesized in this brief Lab Report.

The challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested all of us personally and professionally, changing what GEAR UP does and how we do our work. As time has passed, some challenges remain the same while new ones occur.

SPRING 2020	TOP CHALLENGES	FALL 2021 TO NOW
●	Technology & internet	
●	Going remote	
●	Health & safety	●
●	Social-emotional needs of students	●
●	Reaching students & families	●
●	Personal & caregiving	
●	Work / life balance	
●	Staffing and teacher shortages	●
●	Lack of hugs	
●	Motivation	●
	Learning loss	●

What GEAR UP programs did during the pandemic



PROVIDED TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING

- Supplied laptops and hot spot devices
- Parked buses with hotspots in rural areas
- Offered trainings on how to use online platforms to students, families and staff



FOUND WAYS TO SHARE INFO AND RESOURCES

- Held meetings or events outside, sometimes even on front porches
- Distributed GEAR UP kits with STEM or art activities during food pick up
- Offered drive by events to share information



SUPPORTED ACADEMICS

- Formed stronger relationships with teachers
- Created pods of students to receive supplemental instruction
- Offered online tutoring
- Putting kids in cohorts made it easier to develop meaningful lessons



FOCUSED ON RELATIONSHIPS

- Called students to check in
- Rode the bus to deliver food and see students
- Had more 1:1 meetings
- Provided self-care services



We changed our mentality as educators. We had to rely on our team to work together and learned how to communicate what we needed.



OFFERED SERVICES VIRTUALLY

- Used video conferencing (Zoom, Google Meet, and/or Teams) for student programming, family nights, and educator professional development
- Held college visits, college fairs and career guest speakers online
- Texted using SignalVine, Remind, Google Voice
- Scheduled online appointments with Calendly
- Used social media to connect with students including YouTube and Instagram messages
- Engaged students and families using Kahoot or online Jeopardy



TRIED TO DO MORE

- Took on a lot of responsibility and burden, tried to address the hesitation, confusion and fear
- Moved everything to virtual, not always a success

What we learned from the pandemic



TECHNOLOGY IS NOT A PERFECT SOLUTION

- Zoom fatigue is real
- Students were bored or disengaged with cameras and microphones off
- Staff had a harder time adapting to technology
- Parents are intimidated by technology
- There is a technology gap especially for rural
- Effective virtual learning is so much more involved in design, development, and execution



NEW WAYS TO COMMUNICATE

- Use social platforms more
- Found new recruitment methods



CREATIVITY

- There are a lot of creative ways to interest and provide access to students
- Events need to be engaging
- Need to have more fun!



EMPATHY

- Have patience and grace with students, families and ourselves
- Don't take teachers for granted or the opportunity to provide services to students
- Listen to students: their likes and dislikes; meet them where they are
- Self-care is important



**We were adaptive, productive and innovative.
GEAR UP will survive!**



RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

- The human comes before the academics; the social-emotional is important
- Connected more with students individually at home than at school
- More parents were able to participate virtually; important to meet caregivers where they are at
- Building relationships with families makes it easier to communicate with students



WE ARE PLAYING CATCH UP

- Credit recovery needed; teachers understand the need to backfill to build missing skills
- Students are physically, socially and emotionally behind in behaviors and development



WE ARE STILL LEARNING

- We don't know what we've learned yet—lots of missing pieces. We are trying to pick up the pieces, trying different things, need to determine what is working well as we go
- It's not over yet! We got this and our students. There will be continued bumps in the road but we can do it!



CHANGE IS HARD, CHANGE IS GOOD

- We are not alone; everyone is adapting
- We can pivot and are resilient
- Adapted to new guidelines and customs
- Trying new things is important
- Learning and growing is a whole group effort
- What worked before might not work this year

Innovations from the pandemic

Participants reflected individually on the things they learned and did during the pandemic that they will either keep doing or will try moving forward. The images below show examples of the digital vision boards they created before discussing in small groups.



What we will keep

USING AND LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

- Using and upgrading technology
- Learning tech skills like Google Sheets

OFFERING VIRTUAL SERVICES

- Providing virtual support via Zoom
- Utilizing tech so introverted students get heard as much as the extroverted students
- Using Zoom for privacy needs of families

NEW WAYS TO COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

- Being innovative with ways to share resources
- Having social events in person and virtually
- Using Instagram to stay connected with high school and college students
- Giving chances for students' voices to be heard
- Intentionally using social-emotional learning

PERSONAL GROWTH AND CARE

- Practicing gratitude and self-care
- Challenging myself to grow and learn
- Making change fun

What we will try

USING AND LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

- Social media networking; trying TikTok
- Exploring automation and coding
- Being multi-accessible

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

- Being intentional with outreach / new services
- Setting up GEAR UP pen pals
- Connecting with students that are MIA
- Finding out students likes/dislikes
- Meeting students and parents in their realm of comfort (home, basketball game, etc.)
- Helping parents with social-emotional supports
- Reaching out to community for resources
- Sharing my knowledge with others
- Reaching out to staff more often

PERSONAL GROWTH AND CARE

- Practicing gratitude and self-care
- Being open to change
- Having more patience
- Picking up a new hobby; travelling
- Having fun!