



The COVID-19 pandemic caught nearly everyone by surprise. In almost every facet of our lives, we had to learn to adapt on the fly and adjust to a new normal. In PreK-12 education this is especially true. And yet some schools were simply better prepared because they had already been implementing some of the very techniques that would become essential to master during this challenging time. Schools that were already using tech-enabled lessons certainly had an advantage. In addition, schools that were focused on integrating social-emotional learning alongside core academics were better equipped to support the unique needs of students impacted by trauma over the past two school years.

Many charter schools already had these practices in place, which is why I am pleased to share “From Crisis to Creativity: Can Technology Play a Role in Strengthening Teacher-Student Relationships.” This is a resource developed by Gradient Learning, a nonprofit organization led by educators. It is a tool for educators that offers anecdotes, data, and observations from schools that began implementing – before the pandemic hit – student-centered learning models or experience-based learning approaches that emphasized student agency.

I believe the vignettes in this paper that highlight effective practices will resonate with charter school educators who have the flexibility and autonomy to tailor the educational experience to better meet the needs of students and families. The authors of this report suggest that schools with these innovative practices in place may have fared better in the face of the adversity and ambiguity of the past two years.

Gradient Learning is a trusted partner to communities, schools, and educators that offers the Summit Learning program — a research-based approach to education designed to drive student engagement, meaningful learning, and strong student-teacher relationships. Gradient Learning also offers a free, interactive video journal that teachers can use to guide students to reflect and grow all year long.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated educational inequities that had been hiding in plain sight for decades. When families of public charter schools expressed needs for in-person, remote, and /or hybrid options, charter leaders and teachers had the flexibility to listen and quickly respond to those needs. These decisions were made thoughtfully and enabled by the unique relationships charter schools have with their families.

Families choose public charter schools in part because they are often run by community leaders and former teachers who want the autonomy to make decisions to best meet the unique needs of their students and their families. That was true before the pandemic, and also as we adapted through the many and continuing challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Education is not about a building. It is about having relationships between students and teachers that foster learning.

Many of these solutions to the educational challenges created by the pandemic involved the smart use of technology. As illustrated by some real-life examples in this resource, technology can be used to facilitate and strengthen the relationships with students and their families. Technology tools can also connect students to each other and their teachers in new ways and engage the whole family in learning.

This resource includes innovative steps and ideas for how all schools – charter, district, private, magnet, and home alike – can harness the power of technology to engage students and families with teachers and school leaders. We welcome the opportunity to share these best practices and look forward to building upon this knowledge base to better serve our students and families.



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