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Welcome back. And I want to introduce Michelle Michelle is a technology coach for charter school in New Jersey. First of all, what exactly is a technology coach.

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So my role as technology coach is, has a couple layers, but one of them is to train the teachers. So the teachers, some of them lack familiarity with technology, and the the different tools that the kids can use in the classroom. So my job is to basically show them, for example, flipgrid, and be like, Hey, here's flipgrid, which records the students and you can do all kinds of cool things in that program, like whiteboard, or whatever. And here's how to make that learning, engaging and fun. You know, using technology, but teachers, oftentimes they're not familiar with it, because the kids were digital natives. And they, they there, they know how to use all these tools, but the teachers didn't grew up with it. So it's a lot of the awareness. Like I have to bring the awareness of like, here's some cool programs presented to the teachers, sometimes I'll plan lessons for them I'll come into the classroom and even teach it for them to model what it can look like. I'll work with the students so that way, they learn how to use the new technology to and provide feedback. And a lot of times teachers come to me with, you know, questions like, I want to try to use this, how do I do it? Or I'm trying something new, can you come in and help me? Or I have a lesson a unit on butterflies. And it's sometimes they're like, Oh, it's kind of boring. I have a lesson on butterflies, I want to, you know, do something fun spunk Get up. So what can we do, and I'll say, oh, like, let's you know, try, you know, this program, or let's, you know, let's do a collaborative class, Google Map, or, you know, I'll just provide different methods and design it for them sometimes, to show what can be done. I also provide, like professional development. So I'll like create workshops and training experiences, to take them through how to use some of these new programs, if they want to try it on their own. I've created a digital badging program to reward them. Because sometimes teachers are nervous about asking questions. And I instituted this badging system because I want them to feel confident to ask questions. And so any question that comes to my email that I'm like, Oh, that's a really good question. I'll answer it. And I'll share it with all the staff at all the four schools, four elementary schools. And, you know, that way everybody can have that information that was being asked, and, and I'll give them a badge feel like, you know, great question or, you know, so I have fun with that, too. But it's, it's a really rewarding job. Because I, one of the things I enjoy is that enlightenment that aha, like, Oh, I didn't know I could do that. And then they get inspired and excited about teaching again, I think some people lose that pizzazz, or flair for what it means to be a teacher and how much fun it can be. Because we get so inundated with our curriculum and time constraints and standardized tests and admin stuff. And it's just it's it, you know, it gets overwhelming,

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and even to the great position, because, you know, it gives somebody the ability to go to the classroom and say, Hey, why don't you try this, instead of having the teacher, try the same thing over and over, you know, doing the same thing over and over someone in your capacity, they can say, well, instead of doing it, the way you've been doing it the last 10 years, here's a new way of doing it. So that way, the students, it's more engaging for the students, I feel

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Yeah. And it's, I'm trying to really, like inspire teachers and bring their joy of teaching back. But using technology as like, the leverage to bring back that excitement and fun for both them and the kids. And that works sometimes and the other. The other thing with the teachers is, there's a lot of insecurity and fear, like what if something goes wrong, and they don't know how to navigate that and having me there in the room with them or you know, available is like a life raft or, you know, or I can be in the room, like almost holding their hand. It's okay, we're going to do this together. And it gives them that confidence to say, Okay, I'm gonna try it. You know, I'm going to jump in that pool and see if I can swim and like, you know, if not, I've got my lifeguard right here.

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And that's a perfect segue to what I'm gonna ask, you know, you obviously with COVID the last year Was your school open or closed during COVID.

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So we were open the whole time, we were open beginning in September. It was hybrid for a long time. So they had like a team a and then a Team B. So the kids would come in, you would have Team A coming in for three days in the week, and then Team B would be two days in the week, and then the following week, it would flip. So Team B would have three days and Team A would have two. And it was only for the, you know, kids that feel comfortable coming in, and their families felt comfortable with them coming in. They did have these opt in periods, it was generally around the end of the marking period, where they were like, Okay, if you're feeling comfortable, now, you can switch and bring your child in to the, to the classroom. And they of course, we did the social distancing, we followed all the CDC guidelines, the masking, there was a lot of if there was an opportunity to go outdoors, they did try to send kids you know, outdoors for, for movement breaks, and for just an opportunity to have fun, you know, kickball games, or whatever learning outside whatever it was lunch, snack, they didn't have lunch, officially. So we were on the half day schedule. And they could still have snack time. And that's where they were allowed to sit at their desk, take their masks off. There were some challenges with with that, though, you know, the kids, they do like to be near each other. And it's, I think it's just a human instinct kind of thing. It's very, very hard to maintain proximity, even at our age, I think, to have that self awareness and to make sure you're maintaining the distancing. Because I think we genuinely love each other, you know, and we want to be, you know, that that connection, part of it is physical. So they had a hard time with, you know, the spacing, but they did good with the masks the masks, they were our kids, I mean, K through five, if you can imagine these little ones, and they were so good about keeping those masks on, you know, sometimes you had to like maneuver the masks a little bit to get them to stay up for the little guys. They really, really were so good about it, you can imagine how hard that might have been for them.

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You think your school was prepared for COVID?

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So in some ways, yes. I think mostly, we were prepared, we had a nice strategic team that worked together for for the year, trying to work on the back to school, like, you know, what does this look like at this phase and that phase and like taking us through all the different changes in the guidelines and changes in vaccination status, and they kind of like said, Okay, now at this point, we're ready to do, you know, we can allow for, you know, this component, you know, or we can have more kids come back in or, you know, they also set up like how to do the bus time, you know, like, bus time is always a little bit difficult when you have in your public school, and you have all these kids needing to a lot of parent pickups, because they didn't trust the buses with the virus in the air. They didn't want the kids on the bus. So that was difficult to manage, like, how do we get all these cars through our parking lot safely. But it was all really well thought out. After the strategic committee came up with plans, the principals presented it to the staff, they kind of like, let the staff state their concerns, and then they, you know, went through with whatever was the final final word on. So with that, yes. I also feel like they did have a strong outreach with community. I felt like there was a really strong community outreach, like a lot of communication, a lot of surveys, surveys for staff to like, how do you feel about this? Are you ready for that? What's your preference on? You know, what's your preference on, you know, the hybrid plan because all of our kids came back. You know what it was? It was it was an interesting timing situation on March 15. That's when they decided all the teachers could get their vaccines if they hadn't yet, and that's the day all of our students came back full time. And I'm not and no more hybrid team, a team b all of them came back together. And I'm not really sure I kind of felt like maybe they should have given all the teachers like another month to make sure they're all vaccinated first before we bring all the kids back. But at the year's at the year end each grade level had I would say anywhere from like five to 15 ish students that were distance learning for the districts, actually, most of the kids in Warren township came back. And I think I, you know, I think they really value the kids being in school, I think that they think that's part of the learning processes, the proximity and having the kids there. And being part of that learning environment, the learning environment.

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Good. Was there any new technology that you had to learn, because of COVID.

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So, for me, I pretty much knew all of it. But there was a rush to teach teachers how to use all of it. not this past year. But of course, when we all first went out the previous March, not last March, but the march before when everybody was like, you know, in this state, you know, was like your home, nobody's going to school. That was a mad crushed to learn. So there's a big learning curve there. It was me and two, three other people, two instructional specialists, and one other technology coach. And we were basically in charge of teaching how to use Google Classroom for anybody who hadn't started it yet. So everybody was using the same LMS learning management system. To house you know, student work, and to have a communication section, Google meet, of course, to do the, you know, the video, and the communication element as well go Guardian as spyware. So that way, you make sure that kids are on task, if you need to push windows open for students, if you need to do a chat with students, it was an easy way to do that jam board, which was like the whiteboard kind of tool. So that way, you could see the kids like working on there on the whiteboard screen was Oh, and flipgrid was really, really essential, especially for the specialists, that's the where the kids can record themselves. It doesn't have to be live, it's asynchronous. So the kids will record themselves doing video or speaking or whatever it is they want to do. And the kids, the teachers can post and the kids can record and then it's all in one platform, I would say those were the biggest technology, tools or programs that had to be pushed out, like, right away.

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Was there technology that people did not want to adapt to?

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Um, you know, it depends on so each teacher is a little different as we know, and because we're people, and some people have a very, they're like, oh, let me go, let me take a risk, I'll have fun with it, let me get to explore it's okay to fail kind of mentality. And those are the people you can really run with, for this kind of stuff. And then there are some that are more timid and nervous and afraid. And those are the ones that, you know, it takes a long time for them to so even though they'll do it, they'll do it. Maybe more of a in a minimalist kind of way. So like they'll use Google classroom, but maybe just to post an assignment, and they don't use any of the other features of it. Or, you know, go guardian. They know of it, but they're, they're afraid to use it, they don't know how to use it, you know, so like, because there's so many things you can do in go Guardian, you know, if the kids are off task, you can lock them, you know, or you can redirect them to websites you want to use or block websites they're not supposed to look at and they're just they get very nervous about doing it wrong. Right? You know, so what if I block this website and it doesn't work and I tell the kids, I'm blocking them from YouTube, but it doesn't work or, or I accidentally block it for the whole day for all of their classes instead of just mine. And and then what you know, there's a lot of so they don't, they don't even try it. And it's I'd say that's one of the more challenging things is trying to overcome those hurdles, trying to recognize who who these teachers are that need that extra help and trying to get them that help that they need. I do when I can when I find them.

14:46

No, as a parent myself of a, you know, seventh grader and my son just graduated out of college. I saw you know, the struggles that they went through my son he he had a teacher didn't post anything for four weeks, like, you know, the guy went Mia, on him. And then he came back, and you know, was doing videos and stuff was a science course, you know, and he was worried He's like, this guy's not. He's not posting every week he would go this guy is not that posting anything. And then he started. I think a lot of it was, you know, again, technology is new. And yes, it was a learning curve for some people, you know, some people are very, you know, they grew up with computers. So it's very easy. But people who've been around for a long time, and it's, you know, they, as you know, this, there are people who are very stubborn. They are what do we have to change? What do we have to change? And they don't, they don't want to change? And it was, yeah. In my daughter's case, you know, they she says, You know, I did 11 o'clock meeting, and I go there, and there's no teacher. No, that was that was another issue with, with COVID. And I think that's up here up in, in northern jersey, in once the school year flipped into September, they actually had this, the teachers go into the classroom, and teach from the schools and not teach from home, I think a lot of it was because a lot of parents were complaining that they were supposed to have a class at 11 o'clock, the kid would go and open the class, and there's no teacher, nobody there. Yeah, so that was I don't know, if it's a technology. Was it a technology issue? Or the teacher decided? Well,

16:30

yeah,

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you know, I got, I got something else.

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We had a few teachers that relied heavily on their co teachers, who were tech savvy, to create the material for the online platform. So you know, whether was, you know, and when I, one of the tools I forgot to mention, which was probably one of the most pivotal was screencastify to just, you know, pre record, whether it was you know, a presentation or a lesson themselves reading a book to the kids, whatever it was, but using screencastify to have those pre recordings, especially when the kids were home, not so much the hybrid, but definitely for the distance learners or for when we were all at home, to have those screencasts was like essential. And then I would say, Oh, uh, one of the things they did that was kind of unusual, and I'm not sure I'm a huge fan of is that bitmoji classroom. I don't know, if you've seen the bitmojis from Snapchat, like those little avatar creatures where they basically turn themselves, the teachers turn themselves into avatars. And then they have like, in a slide deck, and like Google Slides, they'll have like, little books or, you know, or a chalkboard and, you know, they can click on the hyperlink it to other places. I love the idea of hyperlinking. And using those objects, and you know, using the slide deck as a springboard to go to other activities. But my concern is that a lot of teachers invested a lot of time in creating these bitmoji classrooms. And I think it's a fad, kind of like the among us fad. And I am afraid that in another year, it's going to be outdated, and then they're going to have to recreate all over again. I'm not I'm not a big fan of having to recreate everything. I like modifying things. But like, we work so hard, and our time is so short, to have to recreate everything all the time is just crazy. And I I don't know, I feel like they were wrongly advised to go into bitmoji worlds because I think it's going to be outdated real soon.

18:49

I agree. Was there a piece of technology, either hardware or software that you wanted to use, but was prevented from the higher ups from using?

19:01

Well, I've had things in the past that I've always wanted to use. And some programs that I've wanted to use include I want the kids to have access to create their own Google Sites. And they've been blocked from that they can see and view teacher developed websites within the domain. But aside from that, any Google sites are off limits and it's blocked and they can't create their own which I think that's a disservice. I think the kids can really create some really cool portfolios webquests they can create their own digital breakout rooms like there's so many really cool features that Google sites can offer. The way it's designed the way it lets them design be the designers. It's That's a shame. I love insert learning as well. Insert learning is where you can take any website You as a teacher can put in text boxes, or discussion chats, or it's basically you're inserting a box and you can write it your own question and then do a multiple choice. Or you could say, have a discussion about it, kids can make a chat in there, or it's an open ended. Or you can put post it notes in there to have the kids like, you know, look for this or watch that. And the kids can also highlight, or you can highlight in there. And it's kind of a really great interactive tool where, you know, there's a lot of times you have a website, where you're like, Wow, that's awesome. And teaching this concept, and you want to make it interactive. And for some reason, I, you know, a lot and a lot of it comes down to expense, right, we you know, let's face it, it's expense. Fortunately, we do get Padlet to go through this year, that was that was a real perk. So Padlet is basically kind of like Pinterest, if you've ever done Pinterest, it's basically a wall where kids or teachers can create a wall. And then they can like the teacher could post a whole bunch of resources that the kids can use on that wall, and the kids can just click on it to go there. Or they can create a wall and the kids can post their own resources on there. The kids can make comments, they can rate resources, they can even draw their own stuff on there, there's so many things Padlet can do. So I'm really, really happy that we've acquired that for our teachers to use this year. But yeah, there have been many things. You know, there have been many, many programs that I would I would love to explore further, generally speaking. We're always faced with the almighty dollar. Yes.

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The one that determines, would you do anything different if I haven't, say we have another pandemic?

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Ah, you know, the pandemic was really hard, because even for my role a lot of teachers didn't like, and they didn't feel comfortable with you coming physically into the classroom. Because nobody wanted any further exposure, right. Nobody wants to be exposed to additional germs. So it was really hard for me to physically get into the classrooms. And I wish I could have done that more. One of the things I did provide for the kids that I think was really well responded to was I made seasonal choice boards that I sent out for the district. And it was basically theme based, like I did one for Star Wars for May 4. And it was Google slide deck. And it had like all different activities I found and so the kids could interact, do something fun. I really wanted to keep the joy in this year, because I feel like so much of it was I think a lot of people were negatively, like emotionally affected. I feel like a lot of people were depressed, maybe off course off kilter. They didn't know what to do. So I was trying to bring some happiness back. So yeah, this Star Wars choice, choice boards, and like, you know, I did one for the winter. I did one for you know, summertime, you know, beach, you know, beach season. I, I think everybody really loves that. So I would definitely, and I was showcasing, hey, like you can do this with any unit of study. So that's something that I think work well, but I would carry over for next year. But I think your original question was what what was what, what was they not? I shouldn't do something anything different now what we different? Now getting into the classrooms, but I don't know that I could have done that.

What else would I do different?

Maybe more. I did a lot of like troubleshooting recordings. Like a lot of teachers were like, Oh, you know, I can't do this? Or how do you do that I need to fix this. So we did a lot of troubleshooting. But maybe more teaching recordings like it because we didn't have a lot of one thing our district could have done better, I think was the professional development element. You know, with regards to technology, and I feel like they didn't want to overwhelm teachers. So they really backed off and they didn't want to engage the teachers in anything additional feeling like they were burdening them but maybe some teachers would have been interested or I could have built up that resource for this coming year. I do have a folder of all of my video screencast tutorials, kind of like your podcast J rod. You have You have your podcast series, I have a huge Google Drive folder with all of the programs and how to use this and how to use that. And like I did give staff access to that this year, I give them access to the whole screencastify folder. And the minute I make a new screencast, it gets tossed right into that folder. It's just not organized. So the new ones they know are sticking out of the folders. They're not in a folder yet. But that's one good thing. I really think just for them knowing it's there. And if they have questions, and they are not comfortable with asking where they just it's like 11 o'clock at night, and they're stressed out, and I want to try to figure it out. They can literally search in their Google Drive, and hopefully one of my screencasts will pop up to save the day.

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All right, last question. Any advice for any technology coaches out there? Or future technology COACH

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Yeah,

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so it's interesting. I'm actually the technology coach, I was working with retired. So I have a new technology coach coming on board this year. So I have to kind of like work with her and, you know, onboard her to that too. I think the most important thing for me is making them realize that the the most important thing in this role is to help the teachers and help, right. You know what we're trying to help merge technology with instruction. And, you know, that can be very exciting. It can be difficult at times. But it can be very stressful for people. And instead of focusing on the elements of stress, making it easy for them, making it fun, making the making it something that they want to continue, you know, like say, Oh, this is really exciting. I want to do that, again, you know what, that was so successful with that program, maybe I'm willing to try something more, you know, or, gee, I never realized I could use this program that way. Maybe I could try that too. And just get like opening up a whole new world of what technology can be for the teachers is really what I try to do, and I want to inspire other tech coaches to do the same. It's really about inspiring others and carrying that spark to the teachers so they can share it with their students, and then they can love learning to win. We can all be happy, lifelong learners together.

27:42

All right. Thank you so much, Michelle, for

I hope I answered all your questions.

Yes, you did. Thank you so much.

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All right. All right. Thanks, Jrod. We'll talk soon

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