

## **Covid-19 Experience From A Teacher and Mother of 3**

*Note: I have not had an interruption in my salary or healthcare during this time. All three of my daughters are above average students that need very little support from me to complete their work. I am White and my daughters are Mixed Race. I live in a two bedroom apartment in a rural area of New Jersey with a town population of 10,000. 75% of the people in this town are White. I have high speed internet and have received devices for myself and my children from the school district. It is important to consider my conditions as you read my experience.*

**February 2020** News of “CoronaVirus”, as it was named at the time, hit the news. Here’s what we know. It’s not here yet. It originated in Wuhan, China. Well, I’ve been through this before, Bird Flu, Ebola, etc. I’m not that worried.

**March 2020** Teaching staff is informed to come up with 4 weeks of instruction should we have to close schools. As I said, these things are just bureaucratic precautions. I did this in 2004 for the bird flu. It’s just another day on the job. That evening I went to the store. All the toilet paper was gone. A little thing like not having toilet paper can really change your perspective. Is this for real? I went back to work to make copies for my students even though we were under a directive not to panic copy. Sure enough, the

next day at work we all received a new directive, “Everyone have your materials ready by the end of the day.” I tried to help other teachers as best as I could. There were long lines at the copy machine. Staff seemed frustrated and confused. “It’s ok everyone, we’ll be back after spring break,” I told my friends.

My heart broke for healthcare workers and all of the people that lost their loved ones. I stayed informed, my whole family was glued to the TV. We were in awe of the amazing leadership of Governor Murphy and Governor Cuomo. Their daily briefings brought horrible information, but under their leadership I felt safe. Even Donald Trump was acting presidential. He read his speeches, and a monetary relief package was on the way.

I’m embarrassed to admit that I was enjoying my pause. I had food, water, an income, and best of all, my three tween daughters had nothing to do but hang out with me! We went hiking, played cards, watched Netflix...Tiger King, All American, On My Block , three great titles.

As for school, there was no online teaching at this time. We used google classroom to assign work and post videos. My fourth grade students were doing their best with the review math packets and online reading assignments on their own.

Lower income students suffered. While their parents were working, they lacked the structure needed to complete work at home. I used my cell phone to call and text parents in a fruitless effort to keep their kids focused and learning. What could I do? They were working at the grocery store, the nursing homes, hospitals . I needed to do whatever I could to support these essential workers, and this will all be over soon. I'll catch them up when we get back to school.

April 2020

We're still not back at school. Everyone gets antsy. Everyone's an expert. Scientists are under attack. President Trump wants packed churches on Easter. A Fox News anchor whines, "People need to get their hair done, people need to get their nails done." In parts of the country, cases are rising while restrictions are being lifted.

People in New Jersey are irresponsible so Governor Murphy is forced to close state parks. I feel cooped up in my apartment, and wish that I had my own outdoor space. I look for other rentals, but I can't afford it. I'm not denying that I have it good. I recognize and appreciate my privilege.

Conversations start to get heated. People in my town think it's all a hoax. I heard from her sister that my childhood friend , a respiratory nurse, has PTSD and started taking medication. My neighbor, an EMT worker is exhausted and without PPE. Another nurse hangs her mask on her rearview mirror , “just in case,” she says.

The [x] family is all good. We're still safe, happy, chillin. Enjoying our pause and our entitlement.

May 2020

We have started live teaching with little support and zero training. But our school district is great. Everyone is Committed to education and the community. I'm a little concerned about how the kids will fare in September, but we are still in crisis mode, just getting by. Parents are losing their mind, trying to sue the school district for what, I don't know. Kids are giving up . Parents are giving up. The weather is nice and parks are going to reopen. Governor Murphy has done a fantastic job. Infection rates and cases are down. Restrictions begin to lift according to data that supports these decisions.

The death of George Floyd brings an overwhelming sadness to my family. Since we have nothing else to do we are all forced to pay attention. I'm a White mom raising

Black kids. It was time for my yearly conversation with my daughters about the police. Basically, they are warned to avoid the police at all costs, and to do whatever they have to do to make it home alive. Oh yea, and they are not allowed to make mistakes like their White friends.

I received an unwavering letter from my superintendent of schools that gave me hope. The letter stated that the school district's commitment to a curriculum of cultural inclusivity . For my rural town, that signals huge progress. The police in town give water to protestors. More progress. It makes me smile.

President Trump has nothing to say. We haven't heard from him since he told us to inject bleach into our veins. He's bored of this whole pandemic issue and is ready for it to "All disappear, like a miracle."

Betsy DeVos , our Secretary of Education is also silent. We have accepted that there is no coordinated national response for public health or public education. There is a whisper that Secretary DeVos and Mike Pence want huge tax breaks for parents that send their kids to private school. Their mission is to get that language written into the next spending package. And the inequality continues to grow.

## June and July 2020

School is out . The kids made little progress from March to June, but I don't think they lost anything.

Protests around the country make many White people uncomfortable for two reasons. First, the protests have nothing to do with them. Second, they don't want to feel guilty anymore. White people all over the country start "doing some research" through Youtube, Facebook, and Podcasts. They find a narrative that makes them feel better. The Trump Administration has not done much governing on the issue beyond tweets. They continue to spend taxpayer money on vacations and golf outings. The chaos benefits their bank accounts.

My oldest daughter finds her voice. She loses friends that will never understand the America she lives in. She's ok with it and I'm proud of her.

I break the seal and order takeout! It's delightful! I don't think we eat a home cooked meal all summer. We start to get used to wearing masks. Some think wearing masks is oppressive, unhealthy, fascist. They forget that there is also a mandate on wearing pants, shoes, and shirts in public.

But the extra square of cloth puts them over the edge. They know more than Dr Fauci, a man that served American public health in various capacities for more than 50 years, and has been an advisor to every U.S. president since Ronald Reagan. These same people want the poor guy fired. White men storm the capitol building in Michigan with guns drawn. Police stand down.

Everyone in the education community is waiting with baited breath about the upcoming school year. I can't wait to get back to school and remedy the damage done from March - June. I can't wait to be a frontline worker and do my part. I need my children to get back to in person learning so that they can be prepared for the future.

## August 2020

School reopening plans are in full swing. So many opinions! I spend the better part of the summer talking, and talking, and talking! It's exhausting. There is a reopening committee for our district and a hybrid plan is decided on. Teachers are losing their minds. Most want to stay home. Governor Murphy passes chapter 78 relief, showing teachers his support, but our union does not support his "Road to Reopening" plan for in person learning. I'm mad about that. Grocery store workers and gas station attendants go to work every day for a fraction

of what we make. We can certainly put on a mask and go to work with our students six feet apart.

Our school's in person plan has flaws. Equity among teacher work hours, student access to technology, and the hybrid model has issues that need to be addressed. But as far as safety is concerned , we have a great plan.

I have 2 small cohorts and will only see 10 kids in person at a time. The custodial staff worked so hard all summer long to move furniture and place desks six feet apart. We have H-VAC filters, an outside door, and good ventilation in our rooms. The kids are required to wear masks at all times. They are in person for only 3 hours a day. Building cleanliness is better than it has ever been. I begin to think about how I'm going to navigate this year with my students.

## September-October 2020

Election campaigns are in full swing. School reopens. It's hard. Trying to manage online students at the same time as in person students is a two person job. Cameras arrive and they seem to work pretty well. The kids are behind. Their bedroom is not a good learning environment. They can barely read and have no stamina. Their attention span is SHORT to say the least.



We have a new principal. She works very hard and brings a sense of intelligence , organization, and calm among all this chaos. Why aren't more women in charge?

The administration's job is impossible. They effectively listen to the needs of the community and the students. My district does a great job with transparency and two week quarantines. With no direction from any state or federal officials, they've come up with a great plan. We have had cases , and cohorts have been ordered to quarantine, but our school does not shut down entirely. Fall sports are in full swing. Everyone is trying their best.

My daughters tell me they will never complain about going to school again! This makes me cry. They understand that they have a basic civil right to a quality education, and they will never take that right for granted.

**November 2020**

My family has still not been directly affected by this catastrophe. I thank God every day for this. Again, I know that I am one of the few lucky ones. Cases are rising and we are on a path for another possible shutdown.

In school we are managing as best we can. There are bad days for sure, and we are working harder than ever. I feel like I have great support from my administration and colleagues. But we need to be careful of “toxic positivity” . This is not sustainable. Kids need to be in school. The government needs to take care of small businesses and restaurants , and get schools operating as its first priority.

Our school district decided to operate remotely as a precaution after Thanksgiving. I appreciate this move . I also appreciate that I am able to teach from school. Four people live streaming in a two bedroom apartment is close to impossible.

We have elected a new president that seems interested in governing. The first lady is a teacher! Hope is restored.

## December 2020

Here we are . A vaccine has arrived. Scientists are amazing. Still, I am reluctant to take it, and am almost thankful that it is not yet offered to me or my family.

I'm feeling a little blue these days. My oldest daughter's school has been remote since Thanksgiving and it has taken its mental toll. Her teachers are awesome, I hear them on their meets. She's getting good grades, but she's

anxious. She's worried that she won't be prepared for the future. She hates remote learning. We are looking into private schools that offer in person learning. They are only \$ 40,000 a year, my entire take-home salary, so it should be no problem.

We had to all work from home one day because a nor'easter was on its way. I taught in the closet, while one kid was at the dining room table, the other two in their bedrooms. That was fun.

But the next day we had a snow day! A GLORIOUS snow day where we didn't turn on our devices at all! It was exactly what I needed to prepare for what is to come.

This is the end of my journal. Here are some thoughts according to my perspective and hopes for the future.

**To the Governor-** Keep prioritizing in person learning. Require administration to use the new federal money for building space and improvements, PPE, Cleaning staff and supplies, teachers, and small class sizes, SECOND to technology. These investments will pay off long after the pandemic is over.

**To my Colleagues-** We are frontline workers whether you like it or not. Take the leave offers if you need to . I

apologize in advance for sounding insensitive. I look forward to reading your stories and hearing your perspective as we are in different schools and on different schedules. Just remember, teachers can't teach without kids . I'm concerned that this may be the beginning of the end of the public school system. Anyone that thinks online learning can suffice is lying to themselves.

**To My Friends-** Stop sending me soundbites and conspiracy theories in the middle of the night. Go to bed. Concentrate on your craft and your family. Put your phone down. You have to read more than a paragraph, over many years, on a topic in order to become an expert. If you can't name the vice president in 1995 without looking it up, you have no business posting your political opinion on line.

**To The Media-**Keep doing your job. Be responsible.

**To The Future-**I hope things get better. I hope I can have polite discourse like I used to have in college. Healthy debates are great.Let's try to listen to each other. Things like small class sizes in schools and social justice reform need to continue when this disaster is over.

