



Douglas County School System



Douglas County School System (DCSS) is a large suburban district in Douglasville, Georgia, roughly 20 miles west of Atlanta. When Georgia's governor announced state-wide school closings for the remainder of the year, the DCSS leadership team developed a plan to keep things running smoothly in a digital landscape. Fast-forward two months and DCSS is proud to say their students have experienced continuity of learning and their teachers feel confident using the high-quality instructional resources in their toolbox. For example, over the last two months students spent **over 2,400 hours on individualized learning in Classworks with a focus on high mastery!** How did they do it?

I sat down with Dawn Taylor, DCSS Coordinator of Professional Development and wearer of many hats including managing the administration of online instructional resources like Classworks.

Dawn and I discussed:

- How they were able to quickly make the transition to remote learning
- Quality over quantity when it comes to instructional resources
- The importance of professional development
- The key to a successful remote learning strategy

About the District

Douglas County School System

Students: 26,441

Teachers: 1,652

Schools: 38

Free/Reduced Lunch: 62.1%



Interview: Dawn Taylor, Coordinator of Professional Development, Douglas County Schools & Michael Lopes, Sr. Marketing Specialist, Classworks.

First and foremost, how are you and your family doing, Dawn?

Thanks for asking! Happy to report that we're all good. It's been nice to have the "pause-button" pushed and spend some quality time together. That being said, we're all in agreement in wanting some normalcy again. I miss my schedule and my work-family.

Looking at your data, it seems like teachers and students haven't missed a beat with using Classworks. Kudos! I know that Classworks is one part of your remote learning strategy. How were you able to make the transition to remote learning once it was clear that school closures would be longer than anticipated?

I won't lie, it was a challenging transition at first. But overall, it's been very exciting and I've learned a tremendous amount! Back in October, we developed a digital learning day plan that was meant to be used for inclement weather. We quickly realized that plan wasn't comprehensive enough for long-term use. As a district, we developed what we call "Phase 2."

Phase 2 tackled the issues not addressed in our short-term plans such as reaching students who don't have internet access and developing a system for checking out Chromebooks. We also used this as an opportunity to address the parent frustrations we were hearing. As a parent with four kids, I definitely related to their concerns. Imagine having multiple students all needing to share one computer for multiple assignments. Add-in the layer of parents now working from home and it gets even more challenging.

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What technology factors did you have to consider?

On the one hand, we're extremely fortunate to be able to provide a laptop for every student. But, there's the issue of internet access for some students. In response to this challenge, we've been able to implement some really innovative, out-of-the-box ideas. Like outfitting our buses with mobile hotspots and parking them throughout our communities.

How did you decide what instruction would be taught and what resources teachers would use for remote teaching?

Ultimately, we are using the resources that most lent themselves to high-quality teaching and engagement with the students in a remote environment. It was important for us to come up with a consistent schedule that allowed for flexibility and consideration of what students and parents had going on at home.

For remote learning, we focus on one subject per day from Monday to Thursday and using Friday as a day for electives. We've really stressed the importance of teachers providing virtual direct instruction and follow-up with students. Students need to see their teachers. They've built that connection with them already for most of the school year. And, it goes a long way to helping build motivation and accountability. Teachers record and upload 60-minutes of instruction in middle schools, and 45-minutes in elementary schools. Then, there is an assignment for students to complete.

Students always end their day with 30-minutes of Classworks activities based on the day's subject. Classworks has been a really amazing tool for continuing intervention and extra practice for students. We adopted Classworks in August of this school year. We use it to provide individualized learning for students based on their Renaissance Star results. We use the tier one reading and math resources as a supplement and we use Classworks progress monitoring to monitor interventions and make adjustments as needed.

“*Classworks has been a really amazing tool for continuing intervention and extra practice for students.*”

Teachers and students quickly became comfortable using Classworks because of its ease of use, so they were easily able to continue their learning in Classworks when schools closed. Looking at our monthly usage, there have been around 108,000 launches of Classworks with students spending over 2,400 hours working on activities. It was our number two most used tool right after Google Classroom.

The best part for me as the person who manages these types of programs at the district is even with such high-usage, we've had virtually no issues with the program. Teachers with questions have had them answered in real time using the Classworks chat feature. I'm very impressed with how smooth it has been!



Teachers have done some really good work incentivizing students to partake in digital learning. As a district, we think it'd be a fun idea to host a big summer bash for all the students that spent this time working hard. Once things are safe, of course!

[You mentioned Google Classroom. How are you using it to support learning?](#)

We found it was important to implement a consistent Learning Management System, and for us that is Google Classroom. We try to be careful not to use too many apps. That's a huge pain-point for parents, especially if they have multiple children working between 10 different programs. That is another reason teachers have embraced Classworks -- the instruction can be placed right into their Google Classroom classes and students can access it from there.

[How important is professional learning when making a transition to remote learning?](#)

Professional learning has been an important component in helping teachers to make this transition. We've been a Google District for a few years, but teachers weren't ever using Google Classroom as a primary means of delivering content to students. Last week we focused training on maximizing Google Classroom. First, I had to first bring myself up to speed on how teachers could use the program and then translate that into training our teachers to be able to use it daily. As with all new programs, there is a learning curve. But, our teachers have really embraced this opportunity to learn a new way of doing things.

How is DCSS providing parent support and encouraging their involvement?

Parent buy-in is a must. It can be even trickier now that some parents are concerned with things like job security, which understandably pulls their focus. Minimizing the number of applications students are using, providing recordings of lessons that parents can watch at any time and recording technology tutorials are just a few ways we've provided support. Our approach is the more communication with parents the better. We've been doing a lot of reminders that keep them up-to-date on assignments. Principals send out automated calls. Our communications department does a great job of keeping our district website updated with up-to-date information that's easy for parents to locate. We've also been working to provide announcements in multiple languages.

We also started a Digital Learning Hub which is a library for all of our internal resources such as webinars from Classworks and other instructional resources. For example, the Google Classroom training Classworks provided was awesome! My favorite virtual training so far! That kind of training and support is vital for teachers to feel comfortable with using the instructional resources.

What tactics do you feel are important to executing successful remote learning?

It's definitely multi-faceted. For starters, we're very lucky to have the technology infrastructure that we do, with a very responsive technology department.

If I had to pick a key piece though, it's the combination of communication and collaboration in our district. We have really engaged stakeholders at the district level who have embraced this as an opportunity to over-communicate with principals and the rest of the team. Our district has done a really good job at keeping the line of communication open and clear all the way across. Ensuring that all the school and district stakeholders feel heard and understand the plan for learning moving forward is a good starting place for districts who are struggling to find their footing in this hectic time.

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Also, academics are extremely important - I cannot stress that enough. But, right now flexibility is equally as important. Our top priority is the wellbeing of our kids and families. That means grace over grades and being there for students in ways outside of teaching and learning.

What has impressed you most about the way your district handled the recent challenges?

I'm proud of the way DCSS has managed a difficult and unprecedented situation. Without a doubt, everyone has shown flexibility and a desire to do the right thing for students. It's about compassion and taking care of not just the whole child, but the whole family.

Our teachers have knocked it out of the park, making sure all their kids are taken care of and our nutrition staff is working to pass out breakfast and lunch every week. Everyone's willingness to go the extra mile to support our families is really great!

“ *It's about compassion and taking care of not just the whole child, but the whole family.* ”

For more information, please visit www.classworks.com or email hello@classworks.com.

Classworks, by Curriculum Advantage, Inc. is K-8 digital instruction in math, reading, and language arts proven to help students become critical thinkers and independent learners. Classworks provides individualized instruction for every student based on their assessment results to close learning gaps. Classworks also delivers on-grade level, rigorous lessons for the classroom that help teachers teach through technology. Classworks results-driven, engaging educational solutions are built upon strong instructional pedagogy and technological innovation to improve teaching and learning.