Uh, just a real quick reminder. I think this is mostly NROC family here today. But I wanted to remind everyone that the NROC Project is a nonprofit effort, uh, that works to make great multimedia digital resources available to support online and blended instruction. But we really rely on our members and partners and friends. To collaborate with us to try out these resources and help us. So we're always looking for the ways our work intersects with other big projects. And that is one of the ways we've come to really appreciate our relationship with VLLA. Uh, we have collaborated with statewide virtual programs for many years, since the earliest days of their projects and hours. And we've called on their expertise many times for advice. Um, along over the course of these years. So we're really pleased to bring them together today. And have them share some of what they're being asked to share with their States in this particular time. So, uh, we are, we are huge fans of all of these folks and we thank them for joining us today. Hopefully you'll all learn some, some new things as well. So with that, I'm going to let them all introduce themselves. Thank you Terri. And it is great to be here with NROC family. So, uh, really, um, I'm looking forward to our discussion today. My name is Cindy Hamblin and I'm the director for the Virtual Learning Alliance. Um, lots of words. I might say, Alliance for short. But I had the wonderful privilege of working with this group on a daily basis. Um, prior to my role as director, which I started in 2019, I was a director for the Illinois Virtual School. So it was on the other side. Was that benefit? As a VLLA member at that time. Uh, so I look forward to our discussion today and hope you, um, learn a lot and ask good questions. So I'll turn it over to Mr. Currie. Thank you, Cindy.
This is Bob Currie. Uh, executive director of Montana Digital Academy located. At the University of Montana. In Missoula, Montana. And, uh, Like Cindy. Uh, I was previously involved with another program in Michigan. Executive director of Michigan Virtual program for about six years before coming to Montana. And currently I serve as the board chair for the VLLA. Board of directors. And my name's Ryan Schrenk. I worked for Bob. Um, my eye. I'm the EdReady, Montana. Program manager for the Montana Digital Academy. I have been a part of Montana Digital Academy since well, the early days. I was employee number three. Um, helped start our credit recovery program in 2010. Before that I was, uh, an administrator for distance learning. I was a distance learning director for a two year college for eight years in a high school and middle school teacher for five years before that. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Rich Copeland. I'm the supervisor. Teach quality, Georgia Virtual. I'm also the co-chair the PD work group. Teaching. Online. I guess it's about 15 years now. This, uh, this experience is certainly looking forward to. Sharing some takeaways. Hi, everyone. Amy Michalowski. From VHS Learning. Um, I have been I'm the Dean of VHS Learning. I oversee curriculum and instruction and teacher quality in our programs that we offer to schools and families. Um, I've been at the. VHS since. Uh, probably around 2002, I trained as a member teacher.
It's a teaching chemistry and a local high school. And has. Um, had a variety of roles with the organization. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Stacey Schuh and I'm the director of professional learning services at Michigan Virtual here in Lansing. And prior to coming to Michigan Virtual five years ago, I was a classroom teacher. I taught all subjects in a sixth grade classroom. And then I also taught online and was an instructional tech for some of our local intermediate school districts. So I'm happy to be here today. Hello, everyone. Thanks for being here today. My name is Jeff Simmons. I'm the director of supervision and instruction for the Idaho Digital Learning Alliance we're the state virtual school. For the state of Idaho. My adventure in online learning began in 2002 as a teacher. With the first group of teachers hired on an idea. And then I've had the chance to, um, work on the team full time since 2007. And I currently work with our supervision and instruction program. So that's all of our principals and teachers. Internal professional development. Good afternoon. Get that Geetanjali Soni from North Carolina Virtual. I'm the director for teaching and learning. And, uh, I work with that team too on the professional development for our new teachers in service teachers. And as well as teachers across the state. Also working on. Data. And I work as a part of the instruction team. Uh, as the lead for some of my elective courses and our teachers there. Um, Hmm. I've been at NC Virtual for about two and a half years, but my association goes back with online. Learning goes back to. 2000 when I helped start the Louisiana high school, which is now defunct, but it was a long time ago and it was really one of the first. Uh, statewide high schools at one time. Online high schools. It's a pleasure to be here today. Thank you everyone.
Again, welcome to all of you today to our presentation, which we've been titled virtual learning during the pandemic. Uh, top takeaways for the future. As VLLA members, we really do appreciate all the work NROC has done. Just support the K-12 community during this incredible disruption in our educational system. There have been so many lessons learned. New ideas generated. New roles definitely taken on by all, including our leaders, teachers do then send, even of course our parents. So today, um, members of the Alliance, which you just had a chance to meet, we'll share some strategies, lessons learned as well as ideas to consider. Or the future in the areas of instruction. Professional learning. Leadership and communication. So that's kind of how we structured, um, sharing of our ideas for today. First before we do get started, I do want to share just a little bit about our organization, the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance. In the chat, if you would just quickly type yes. If you've heard of the VLLA before, or if this is your first time being introduced to this organization, just a yes or no. If you don't mind. I'm seeing really a good mix of yes and no, which that's great to see. Thank you everyone. And so. To share just a little bit about the Alliance for those of you that are new to our organization. Uh, it was started in 2009. As a means for providing a network of sharing among state virtual schools. Today, the Alliance is a 501c3. Organization. Made up of innovative online programs across the us. And as you can see from the map, we do have a nice geographic spread. As far as our membership. Currently we have 16 members. Um, but soon we'll be expanding to 17. We're bringing on North Dakota as well as Alabama. The Alliance has approximately hundred,
a hundred individual members from each of these 15 programs and they work together on curriculum and professional learning initiatives. Members that share operational and marketing strategies. As well as the technology group, just sharing the latest technology tools. Do these opportunities for collegial sport support and collaborative sharing. Our goal is always around strengthening the community of online learning. So that's the Alliance. We wanted to start just with a thought of thinking into the future and embracing this new educational environment. I started the presentation by acknowledging the fact that the pandemic has really been an incredible disruption in our educational system. Schools. Um, we weren't prepared. We weren't prepared to move remotely many plans. Didn't work well, even with the best of attempts. Areas of equity and access became extremely apparent. At this time with that said, we do know the biggest changes in society occur when there is a strong disruption. A time when we can't go on as business as usual. So we really all believe quality. And then focusing on quality online learning will continue to be a part of that. An educational landscape moving forward. And with that said, I do want to share, um, a set of tools that you will want to check out. Uh, this is the National Standards for Quality Online Learning. These, uh, resources started in 2009 and just recently in 2019. Or updated. It includes a set of quality standards around online teaching. Online programs. Each having a set of standards, indicators, examples, explanations. So you will want to check this out. And we, we know that, um, as we move forward, these will be great resources as we really plan. Quality online learning for the future. So as we move forward and share ideas today, our hope is that. All of you as members of our educational community, embrace this opportunity to improve education.
To really address the deficiencies in our system and explore further opportunities that online learning really can provide students. All students. So with that, I'm going to turn it over to our first group, which are going to focus on lessons and strategies around instructional approaches.

Well, hello everyone. As Cindy mentioned, we are all excited to be here with you today. And I think when we were asked to think about takeaways, benefiting kids during the pandemic, One of the first. Glaringly obvious, like obvious pieces of that. Was the ability for teachers and educators, administrators to collectively come together and share the knowledge that they had. And there was such. An organic movement to share resources and to create professional learning networks together. And it was just amazing to see how many of our VLLA. Members came together and put out synchronous. You know, real time. Webinars for teachers and also asynchronous resources that teachers could use whenever they thought that. And so when this pandemic came down, it was definitely something that none of us expected. And so being able to reach across and share. What was working and what wasn't working was something that was really powerful. And those networks that were built, we'll definitely be supporting.

Learners as we move forward. And I want to give Geetanjali a chance to weigh in here on this one as well.

Thank you. So the other thing we really noticed is that teachers were having to jump into online learning at all different stages of the spectrum of knowing how to do so. And, you know, there's some people who had never done it before. And, uh, you know, others would had some, like when we had teachers from all, for example, I'm not gonna watch your who'd been doing it for years.

So, um, We basically one of the biggest bits of advice we gave everybody was like, you know, it's okay, whatever you do, just take a small step and move forward and make the steps faster and
14:15:02 faster. So that's.
14:15:03 What we kind of said is like start where you are.
14:15:05 And this name comes from a wonderful book. We are reading who said.
14:15:08 It's called Start Where You Are But Don't.
14:15:09 Stay There.
14:15:10 It's kind of influenced those, that language there.
14:15:13 But that's what we really saw is that there is power in collective
14:15:17 knowledge, and that is power in taking the brave first.
14:15:19 First step from wherever you are.
14:15:24 And beyond the pandemic.
14:15:25 I think that's something that we should all remember that we can
14:15:28 always grow and we work the best together.
14:15:32 Wonderfully well together.
14:15:35 Okay with that, I'll jump into the second thing that we learned,
14:15:38 and this is nothing new.
14:15:39 We've seen this.
14:15:41 In face-to-face classrooms and we've seen this before,
14:15:44 but it was really, really clear this time.
14:15:46 The importance of building relationships.
14:15:49 We saw, especially as people moved online,
14:15:52 when students feel connected.
14:15:53 They want to be present and they want to be engaged.
14:15:57 When they connected to each other,
14:15:58 when they connect it to this teacher, the content.
14:16:02 It really becomes a, makes learning much more easy for them.
14:16:06 So we did.
14:16:10 We saw that if you emphasize communication with parents, students,
14:16:13 and other stakeholders,
14:16:21 It is really critical in the online environment to make things
14:16:24 smoother than it may seem like a lot of time upfront,
14:16:27 but it does save a lot of time in the long run.
14:16:29 We also saw that again, this kind of is similar to the first.
14:16:32 Point that's learning partners work.
14:16:33 Students.
14:16:35 Can be partnered to work together. Teachers can pass not to learn.
14:16:38 You know,
14:16:39 Peer support is really important.
14:16:40 At all levels.
14:16:45 Um, we also saw that working with including fun activities,
14:16:49 just like things like pajama days.
14:16:50 Uh, crazy head.
14:16:51 This could also be incorporated online and bring some levity and,
14:16:54 you know,
14:16:55 Excitement into the online cross.
And this, um, he was an academic success cannot be isolated. Relational aspects and things.Uh, and social economic man dynamics. So this is something we noted and I think we can take back post pandemic. To equip our teachers to deal with some of these social. SEL skills and how to build relationships and the community. Even once we get back into the classroom. Uh, Stacy to you.

Yes. And so I would agree with everything that get tangibly set in. Especially. During the early months of the pandemic. It was very traumatic for everyone and it was very different. And so. Having been a parent in that space and watching it, my teacher, my students, my child's teacher online. Doing those things that might be seen as well. Isn't that just a waste of time or isn't that just the classroom talking in a group. Those were the things that were. That meant the most to her and to me, because they were building relationships that would continue on and give her an opportunity for some normalcy in this. In this pandemic. So with that, we'll continue on to our next bullet point here. And that is that technology can help differentiate and personalize learning for students. You know, when I think about technology coming from the classrooms over the years, it's, it's been something that has been seen as one more thing on the plate. Right. We have to use technology. We have to put it in there, but I don't think any of us really realized how. Important it is to think about how we're using technology to support good teaching and learning. And so that was one of the big takeaways and. Items that we think will benefit kids moving forward. Is this idea that. Teachers will use technology in ways that allows students to share their knowledge, that allows students to have a place to collaborate and really think about using technology in meaningful ways that.
That's. Going to exemplify and. And, you know, Share the ideas that our students have. I think one of the technology pieces that I walked away with in those first couple of weeks, as the importance of finding technology, that's developmentally appropriate. And thinking about how that technology can support your struggling learners and learners that are having difficulties. And so utilizing that technology to reach all learners is something that I think in the future will benefit. It tangibly.

Yeah. You know, like everything else too much can be too much. So when you know, teach us is use technologies and students are using them to maybe take it slow and try one new thing at a time. And usually maybe try the one new thing with some old content. So there's not. Both new content and new technology. But slow and steady wins the race here.

I do have to say that in the first few weeks, I'm somebody who, as a youth technology in the past, but as a parent, I was overwhelmed in those first few months with all of the different technology being used. And I, I think in the fall here, we've seen maybe more communication about what is the one tool we're using to do X, Y, or Z. And so I think that that's been good and beneficial for parents, as well as students to know what is the one source of information and what are we using now as a whole district or amongst the first graders or, you know, whatever class subject, but. Yeah, overloading on tools. I think.

The chat. There was one thing that I struggled with in that space. Yeah. And then. The next thing, what did you talk about was the inclusion of student voice and building the foundations. So with so many educators having to take things online so quickly, there was a little more, maybe reaching out to students and asking, okay.

Does this work? How does, how do you feel about this maybe involving there was. In the development of. Refining of lessons as you go forward.
Students are really the best experts on how they learn and, you know, using them as consultants and, you know, As we build new ways to new ways to do things is something we should consider more often than actually sometimes we do. Um, maybe we need to gather information from students about the experience before instead of, you know, giving them something and say, okay, how did you like it?

So that was one of the takeaways that, you know, we were trying to do something new. In situations where we got student voice in, as we built it. There was more success because there was more buy-in.

To have students ask questions and ask about feedback that they were getting. I watched my ten-year-old interact for the first time and he would be one that probably wouldn't raise his hand in the classroom. If he had a question about something that was handed back to him. But now he took ownership of his learning and was asking the instructor. What did I do wrong? How could I do better? And for me, that was really eye opening because I don't know if he would've done that.

In a face-to-face setting as easily.

Good.

Next slide, please.

Yeah.

So the other.

Area that we wanted to touch on was equitable access to quality learning opportunities.

One of the things that we noticed when the pandemic first started is this.

Just.

Glaringly obvious, obvious.

Gap.

In internet accessibility and working devices, both for students and teachers and curriculum and childcare is so important and not everyone has access to quality childcare.

And so we, we saw that gap.

Very very quickly and a lot of our districts and.
Just did an amazing job of starting to think about how we might.
Address those issues.
And so there were busses going out with wifi and being parked in
certain areas to allow for more access.
There were school, internet, hubs, and handing out of computers.
And there were food services around the district who would provide
food. And.
And, um, pencils and crayons and things.
The students who needed them.
There was mailing a physical packages to those who needed the content
in different ways who didn't have access to digital digital
opportunities.
And so while we did all of those things moving forward,
we really need to think about how to make online learning accessible
to every student.
And how we can collectively come together as a community to support
that need. And.
Talk to parents about services and talk to families about what's
available to them in terms of support,
but we really need to make sure that we address those issues moving
forward, because.
It takes all of us.
It takes all of the stakeholders to make a difference and to address
those issues.
And I just like to add to that.
And I think most people are aware of that, that existing inequities.
What kind of amplified during the pandemic?
Uh,
our students who did have access only in the schools, um,
you know, they had no access community access.
Churches.
Libraries was not available. So in some places it was really,
the other big factor was child care because, you know,
in some of our communities,
siblings.
They were taking care of siblings and didn't have the time to do.
The schoolwork as needed.
And then the other end of the spectrum we had, uh,
Students whose parents could afford not only to have or hobby. I know,
for example, in my neighborhood, they will teach us,
was staying at home while hired to have little learning pods so that
they could facilitate small groups.
A group of students while the parents went to work and stuff like
that. So the inequity was completely amplified.
14:26:10 I think during this time,
14:26:11 It just showed that a lot of stuff, you know,
14:26:13 we could put in a lot of systems in place going forward. So.
14:26:17 Things like this happen again, or we have weather related emergencies.
14:26:21 We just can be more equitable across Iowa.
14:26:24 Areas.
14:26:30 And then the final one that I wanted to bring up or something that,
14:26:32 uh, Stacey touched on a little bit, but what do we really,
14:26:35 really learned that schools are way more than a building.
14:26:38 In the schools are way more than, uh, um,
14:26:41 A building that supports.
14:26:42 Education.
14:26:43 It's been.
14:26:44 You've seen that. Um,
14:26:45 We have.
14:26:49 Uh,
14:26:50 students who are dependent on the school for food and nutrition.
14:26:55 We've also seen that coming up the trauma and changed you to call COVID.
14:26:58 And this move to online education.
14:27:00 Has left a lot of students feeling depressed and anxious.
14:27:10 So now there's all our teachers are not equipped to handle this and
14:27:13 not do the really need to be the ones we need support systems as
14:27:16 mental health.
14:27:18 Experts more counselors.
14:27:22 So I think this is a good time for society in general,
14:27:25 to realize just how much public schools and schools are doing for our
14:27:29 kids. And.
14:27:33 We need systems in place that would support the whole child.
14:27:36 Basically food parents need support food,
14:27:38 kids need food and nutrition.
14:27:39 Teachers need support to deal with mental health issues.
14:27:42 Um,
14:27:43 so that's one of the big things of this pandemic it just shows
14:27:46 how dependent.
14:27:47 We have all been on our school system.
14:27:49 And I would just echo Geetanjali.
14:27:51 just said.
14:27:52 We need to also support our teachers.
14:27:54 We need to support them.
14:27:58 In terms of their mental wellbeing.
14:28:02 And just be there because I think.
14:28:04 That right now, we're seeing.
14:28:07 The effects of a very long.
14:28:09 Pandemic.
And.
They need our support.
Thank you, Stacey.
That's, you know, that's,
we're hearing so much about social and emotional support for all,
for all partners that parents, teachers, students.
Um, we're gonna kind of pause for questions.
I think we'll go on to the professional learning and then, uh, do a,
another offer, an opportunity for questions at that point.
Lot of positive comments in the chat. I know.
Butch had one question about, uh, learning loss,
but I think we'll be getting to that in the next piece.
So I'm going to go ahead and move on to lessons learned in the area of
professional learning.

Hey. Great. Thanks Cindy.
Uh, so in Idaho, just like was the rest of you.
Uh, in March, we found ourselves having to pivot often, uh,
just trying to meet.
Uh, the demands that seem to be changing day to day and hour an hour.
And so I thought I would share a couple of things that,
that we changed that I believe will, will remain as positive,
changes to our program.
So I think Terri just chatted that disruption is an opportunity.
That's definitely the way I tried to approach some of this is that
change was needed, but let's change in, in, uh, in ways that we can,
continue moving forward with those changes. So,
one thing we had to do was we had to grow really quickly.
Um, as the state virtual school, we in a rural school.
We were often the only online solution for schools or students.
And so all of a sudden that the amount of students and enrollments
were used to facilitating was growing quickly. So for my team,
we had to grow fast and we had a hiring and professional development
here.
Onboarding model that we were pretty proud of and we would always
start hiring in January in.
Interviews in March and onboard in April and May,
and then train over the summer and had people ready to go in August.
And we felt pretty strongly about that. That it,
it really helped prepare instructor well.
For the online classroom and it did.
Uh, but it was not flexible.
And so well, we had to learn to do was say,
take that whole cycle that you do.
And can you do that in like six weeks?
Uh, and so one thing we did with our professional development is just rethink what really is the most important.
Uh, skills for teachers.
What's the most important things they need to know.
Um, I refer to them as power standards internally.
I don't call them that. And externally, because we didn't have, we haven't identified what power standards are in our program,
but kind of taking that approach.
Like if we can only teach a few things, what would they be?
Uh,
and so that's one thing we had to do as our professional development program was just really rethink what we were covering and make sure we were hitting those most important things. Uh, but with the, um,
Along with the, uh, the change in timelines.
And for our training,
we also realized that our teachers were going to need some extra support.
We couldn't expect to try to just focus on what was most important shortened, the timeline.
It didn't get teachers into a classroom and say, good luck.
Uh, so we, we decided to up our game with our mentoring support for teachers. So.
In years prior,
we've had mentors available to all of our teachers at the content level. So there's a mentor at each content area to veteran teacher,
and they're kind of an as needed support. If you need help,
you reach out, they can help you.
They're available by phone or email and they can walk you through things, but that wasn't going to be sufficient.
For where we were headed with the timelines that we had.
So we actually started implementing a more formal coaching model.
So the person delivering the professional development was also the person who is going to be shepherding this group of instructors for the first few weeks.
In our organization,
the difference between a mentor and a coach is that the mentors available to coaches intentionally checking in with you.
So intentionally.
Uh, once a week, we're going to have a touch point.
A check-in and we're going to touch on some specific items in,
this is what we're going to be talking about this week.
So more of that intentional, um, coaching.
And we actually have a full time Instructional coach, that'll be starting for the middle school and high school side of our program the Monday after Thanksgiving. So, so we're moving this forward and we intend to, to try to keep that as part of our program, because we found a lot of success with that. So that's one shift that we made. Another thing that we did. Um, I guess maybe unintentionally at first and then more, more intentionally as, as the year progressed is we have an annual training event. Every summer. It happens in the summer. So we call it our summer conference. And that's, that's our creative title for that. And we had to make that virtual this year, of course, instead of bringing our full staff into Boise for face-to-face. Um, but in that we decided to make our theme this year, um, an SEL focus for teachers and principals. And so we took two days. We took the first day to just focus on personal growth. And brought in a speaker and had topics, just talked about like stress management. Things like that in health and wellness. And then the second day we talked more about professional growth and what's good goal setting is, and things like that. And, um, we decided that that should then become our theme for our monthly professional development every month. So every month we have what we call the just-in-time training is the second Tuesday of every month. And that's basically our faculty meeting. And so those, the theme of those this year is always touching on some kind of health and wellness topics for teachers and principals. Um, and then over the last couple of weeks, my team has spent time reaching out to every single teacher in principle we have in trying to make a personal connection and a phone call or a text. Email, if we can't get through and just check in on people. And usually when you call a teacher, they want to talk about their kids first, which is great, but we're trying to get them to go a little bit deeper. No, I actually want to talk about you. How are you doing? What are you doing to manage your stress right now? How's your family. Uh, those kinds of things and just really. Trying to encourage our educators to consider their own health and
wellness needs. And we include our principals in that I think. Principals tend to maybe suffer a little bit more silently. Uh, but there’s still, you know, the demands, they are real. So. Those were a couple of things that we’ve pivoted to in our program that I think will remain components of our program as we grow. Uh, and in future direction, where are we headed? We actually just launched the development of some principal professional development. Uh, prior to this year, principal professional development was learning what it's like to teach an online course, getting some exposure to the expectations in our teacher rubric, and then turning them loose to do their principal thing. So we want to make that a little bit more specific and customized to the needs of a principal working in the online environment. And then we definitely want to grow that instructional coach model. So we're looking to incorporate coaching into all of the internal professional development that we do. Uh, so that all of that is more personal and specific. Uh, for our instructors and hopefully, um, More supportive for them as well. So those are the kind of the, two of the pivots that we made in, in of course we did many more, but I want to go ahead and, uh, give some time to Rich in Georgia as well. Jeff before we move on. Dan McGuire asked, um, when you were talking about your new teacher training and only focusing on the important pieces, maybe identify one or two of those important pieces you thought. You needed to touch base with your teachers? Yeah, that's a really good question. Um, so, you know, we, we were covering everything from LMS skills to soft skills, to, um, policy and practices and things like that. And I think what we discovered is that some of those things could be presented differently. They didn't necessarily have to be part of a formal training. So some of it we can repackage and repurpose differently. It just really looked at what are the most basic survival skills I need as an instructor. So, you know, most of that is, focusing in on those basic things you need to do as a teacher in looking at it, both from the LMS side and from the best practice facilitation side. So, you know,
14:36:58 Obviously knowing how to grade would be a fundamental skill that
teachers, so one, I need to know how to do that in an LMS too.
14:37:04 I need to know how to do that effectively.
14:37:05 So what is effective feedback look like within the LMS?
14:37:08 So those are the kinds of things we were looking at to determine those
priorities.
14:37:12 That's a good question. Thank you for asking. Thank you, Jeff.
14:37:14 I'll turn it over to Rich.
14:37:15 Yeah.
14:37:16 I'll just.
14:37:17 What Jeff said, certainly internally.
14:37:19 When the pandemic happened.
14:37:21 It felt a little bit fortunate to be a state virtual school,
certainly for our students at a continuity of learning,
our teachers had.
14:37:27 You know, they,
they knew what to do in April is same as they had done in March.
14:37:31 So there was a real kind of benefit to that.
14:37:33 Um, I will say though, that.
14:37:35 You know, the needs of our students and our teachers.
14:37:38 Did change drastically, obviously not, not just the,
not the methods of online teaching.
14:37:42 But, you know, experiencing that.
14:37:44 Pandemic for themselves.
14:37:45 So I just, one thing I wanted to share in it is to take away our state
superintendent.
14:37:49 Came out very early.
14:37:50 With a letter,
just talking about how it needs to be compassionate over compliance.
14:37:54 We have really focused on that.
14:37:56 And really thought about that.
14:37:59 Exactly what that means, obviously,
that is concerned for the individual, for the students,
for the teachers, for the principals.
14:38:05 But also the compliance part of it as well, because it wasn't just,
Hey, let's, let's throw everything out.
14:38:17 Um, you know, while this is happening and we'll just,
we'll just kind of let everything go. Actually, we,
we looked at what are the essentials? Like what,
what do we absolutely need to insure?
14:38:26 Um, the teachers have said.
14:38:27 Students have.
14:38:29 And one of the, one of the takeaways certainly is.
14:38:30 Mindset and part of that mindset was exactly that notion of compassion
Teaching online is incredibly demanding. That was another one of the takeaways that we had is that we had just, as Jeff said, we had a huge growth. Um, I think we ended up with 70%. Uh, difference over the previous spring. And what we really. You know, teachers that were jumping from the classroom. To teach online or just, you know, Open to supplement or to do a little bit of that. It really is a hurdle for them to understand. Um, the workload necessary to teach online. Well, so that, that was one of the things that. I'll speak externally. We have done a lot of things internally, externally. We realized that there was. Our practice as practitioners of online learning for a long time. Uh, you know, we have, we've really honed down a lot of those skills and yet. Uh, the district schools. District leaders. Even individual teachers were reaching out saying, Hey, listen, we need some help with us. So, what we did is we took our teacher training. That we had established over the, over the last 10 years. That was very, very thorough. Just like Jeff said, we thought we had it pretty down pat. And we reduced it to a one or two hour course. Really again, just trying to pull out some fundamental so that to give teachers that were out in the state, a starting point to give the leaders. A starting point. And we, we that's the digital learning days. We had some of the. In Georgia in Atlanta, some of the larger districts already had plans in place for what happens with you have a snow day, that kind of thing. And they call them digital learning days. So that's what we went with and really just gave some ideas about how to keep that continuity. Of learning. A couple of the challenges that we had, right. Right at the time that COVID started was that we. We're moving to a new LMS. We were deep in our professional learning nodes.
Thinking about how, what our teachers needed to know as far as where the buttons were in the new LMS. But the other part of it was, uh, Cindy mentioned this at the very beginning. It was one of the resources, the National Standards of Quality. Are relatively new at something that a lot of this group has worked on and actually put together. But we were still in the process of really aligning our work, our professional learning. Our observation tools. With NSQ. And so we did another deep dive into our effective online teaching course to really see how well it aligns with NSQ and redesigned it so that it was very explicitly aligned to the NSQ. For two reasons. Number one, we believe in it. We think it is. There's some real purpose to have a look at those national standards. But the other part was. We had stakes. The stakeholders that were coming back to us to say we did the one or two hours. That was great. Uh, but you know, we need a deeper dive on this. And so we released. Our effective online teaching course redesigned. Uh, and it'll add a line directly to the NSQ again, wants to provide that content, but also provide another source to really show folks that, um, you know, this is actually not a new practice. A lot of us have been working in this field for a long time. And there were some national standards for you to have a look at. Um, the final thing I'll share is that again, as VLLA. We looked at a portal to be really a clearing house. And I know that that link is there and I know that Cindy has included. Uh, the link in the resources and that portal really has taken, kind of the. The swaths of professional learning that we have been doing for a long time across all of our different state virtual schools and our partners in the consortium. And compiling those togethers. And that's a really interesting resource as well, because with that, we're able to. We're able to look and see what other than what the other state virtual schools are doing. Maybe where some gaps are that we have,
that somebody else has already filled in.
Um, but again,
Thinking about externally in talking to districts,
talking to teachers.
It's another wonderful place for them to.
Point to and say, look, there is, um, uh,
here's the access.
That you need to, to.
To go find. And if you're thinking about, um, you know,
what you're going to do, uh, in the spring, or maybe even next fall,
the long term,
Of training teachers to really.
To be prepared to teach within the hybrid or, or simply online.
That information is there.
And available. And I just,
the last thing I'll say is I noticed one of the comments earlier.
Was that they hope that this continues right.
This is, this really is a pivot.
It. And I.
I would concur that.
I think that all is all teachers and even all students now have some
experience with learning online. And I think now it.
It's important that it does continue because it does offer.
The possibility of differentiation, different modalities.
For dealing with a pandemic or weather those kinds of things.
And I and I'm really,
I'm really optimistic that this experience though, it's been trying.
Challenging.
Of course that it is going to make a difference in education.
And I'll and I'll leave it at that. And I think, uh, I think Bob,
you're up next to talk about.
Your program.
Thank you Rich. And let me,
I think they do have one more set of slides on professional learning.
So.
This is Ryan from the Montana Digital Academy. And I won't.
I won't try to repeat as very much, but you know,
one thing that happened with us is we were,
we were all sent home at the beginning of March last year and had two
weeks to student schools,
had to have had two weeks to come back and do something that they'd
never done before, which was.
Go remote. And we had over a hundred schools reach out to us.
Though the ones after there,
they went home and felt like they met some of their basic needs.
They reached out to us.
We still have schools that are trying to meet those basic needs and
trying to figure it out and are not ready to hear the message that
what we can do, um, online or in a mixed or blended mode.
That we can do really well, but as soon as they are.
Uh, our team sees ourselves as the one,
the calm voice in the room that can help everybody kind of take a deep
breath.
And our we've a lot, a lot, like what Jeff has experienced in Idaho.
We were able to hire three additional, uh,
we call them our regional ambassadors in our program.
To help.
Uh, apply our differentiated instruction program that utilizes, um,
interacts EdReady program is the backbone of that. And we've, um,
Climbed back up to near where we were before the pandemic.
We have around 5,000 users every month,
individually from upper elementary through adult ed.
That we're working to support, but really what we've learned is that,
those gaps in learning that are happening naturally,
And education and over the summer and that sort of thing.
It's been a real challenge during last spring and this summer where
everybody just basically dropped offline.
Line is what we found. And then, uh,
everybody wanted to come back and they weren't really sure what was
gonna happen in the fall.
But to get people to use the power of what they're trying to do and
complete that online or blended learning loop,
where you have students sitting down at the computer with a plan.
And you are using that online technology to collect information about
them and then inform your instruction.
And complete that loop with your students.
That's really been an important message that we're trying to bring to
the table with our team of ambassadors and, uh,
educators that are working with,
with teachers that in many cases have not had to do this before or not
had to experience it in this way.
Um,
We have to remember that. Not everybody's ready,
but when they're ready, we're here.
And that's really the message that we've been trying to spread.
Far and wide. And I think that is also what everybody on this call is,
as we're going down through the different States and what we've been dealing with.

But having professional development to get that started is so important to these transitions from middle school to high school are very difficult.

Um, and then, uh, with regard to algebra skills and that sort of thing that we've been experiencing for in particular,

And then not having standardized tests to help place students in, in college.

Um, that's another big, big, hairy educational problem.

That we get to be in the middle of right now and trying to figure out what those individualized needs are for both the teachers to help students do that.

And for the students to help make that happen, it has to be a combination of good teaching practice.

Some offline resources where you can get feedback.

And assessment going. That's possible.

In a way that sometimes you have to go the lowest tech way, you know, cell phone pictures still work.

Uh, in a, in a pinch. And so what we're doing is trying to help.

Meet the needs of those teachers that have never had to do this in combination with what they're already dealing with, which your students without connectivity, and a lot of the other things that we've been talking about.

But, um,

we really think that it's important to have that structured planning and iteration process that all good educational programs have.

And so getting an administrator.

And a group of teachers that want to solve those problems around the table is just so important to move it from an emergency response to high quality teaching and learning.

And then I think Bob has some stuff that he'll share about some of the resources that we've been putting out.

But I think we also have to stop and pause here for a.

If there’s any Q and A, at the end of the professional learning.

You know, Ryan, I think thank you.

Great ideas. I think we will go on.

We want to make sure that we touch on the leadership and communication.

So I think we'll just make sure your questions are in the Q and A.

If we don't get a chance to address them, we definitely will add them to the list of questions submitted earlier. So I am going to transition.
Um, to some of the thoughts for enhancing learning lessons learned in leadership. To Bob.

Thank you, Cindy. I think the slide may kind of serve too. Uh, hopefully quickly summarize some of the questions that I'm hearing leaders ask themselves around the state of Montana superintendents and principals as I sit in on their regional meetings.

But all of these points actually apply. Similarly to online learning and the questions that we are processing and asking ourselves as we go through this experience. So really, really what I wanted to focus on are.

Things that probably many of you have been thinking about, hopefully. Uh, but in some cases there's so much in front of leaders that it's difficult to think about some of these points. So one of the simplest things is, you know, this has been going on for a period of time. Now at the end of last year and this year, how well did the remote learning program that we provided in our school work.

And in thinking about that. Um, we kind of blend into the next one where we satisfied with student achievement and outcomes. You know, how did we handle the imbalance?

If you want to call it that of student progress across our student population. How are districts that have gone in and out of various, uh, either hybrid or remote or face-to-face. How are they going to handle graduation requirements for graduating seniors? And I think it's actually applicable to, uh, juniors, sophomores and so forth because the disruption may have caused challenges with regard to.

Uh, you know, pass, fail versus credit.
And in all of the things that go along with high school, such as competing for Valedictorian GPA's and so forth. So I think that's something that still needs to be really thought about. And I'm really quite interested to hear what. What schools are thinking and doing. Um, and then did this experience help shape where we are headed? You've heard a lot from the other presenters about ways that programs were modified. We made some modifications at MTDA that I won't go into that were designed to help. Schools and students. Uh, be more successful in the environment that they were in. Um, and I think there's so much of that, that we're seeing in, in, I'm not going to repeat, but how much COVID has impacted and exposed and equities. Uh, in our whole world, our whole life, but in education in particular. And then is our thinking changing. And, you know, that may sound pretty basic, but. Really what we're talking about there is what will we continue to do? And what is it that we should abandon from the past? I think that there's a, certainly a general feeling in the online learning. Um, world, so to speak that things are not going to be the same. In all the things that we do, whether it's just the explosion and enrollments, it's, uh, more work to get students I'm able to transfer back and forth between different types of. Uh, online teaching or hybrid teaching or blended or face to face. So, so how is it changing our thinking? And then last but not least. And this has been mentioned, I think, uh, several times actually woven through the whole presentation today. What is the best option for learning for our whole school family, students, teachers, parents, as we go forward. What, what kind of a model do we need to. Have in place, what are we going to abandon? What are we going to keep? What new things are we going to try? So that really, that kind of summarizes my take on trying to throw some questions. At the group today to make them think about. You know where we've been, where we're headed and. You know what happens next and how do we prepare for similar
circumstances?
In the future for our students.
I think with that.
We can move to the next leadership slide.
And Bob I'm good at before I move on to, um,
Yeah.
Uh, to Amy in the next slide is a barrier.
Great question in the chat, as far as, you know,
The difference between emergency remote and really the future of
online education. So if someone wants to.
Kind of address that maybe in the Q and A, as we move on to Amy.
I just want to make sure we get to the last few points here.
Thank you, Cindy.
I'm actually thinking about Barry's question.
I have to think about it and thinking that my eternally optimistic
self, um, hopes the answer to that is no,
we have not damaged the future of online.
Learning. Um,
I think that we all as users and administrators and leaders in the
field,
mean to keep making sure that there's a real clarity of purpose for
how online learning has been used in this last.
Um, you know,
time period to know that this is not an ideal implementation or
supported.
Structure.
So hopefully we will continue to see growth and embracing the value
that school can get from online learning.
Um, very quickly though,
just to make sure we have enough time to get to the high level of
communication. I think a lot of these, um,
kind of last continued areas of progress and concerns.
Bob was talking about graduation requirements.
The one thing that I think wasn't really touched out at that.
You know,
when we reflected as a group about this presentation in our own.
Uh, you know, takeaways.
You know, we know that there are a lot of areas of continued progress.
Where students do still need support leaders do still need to answer
it.
In CTE and hands-on vocational programming. How's that gonna work?
What types of support are students getting in that area?
As well as some of the access and safety.
Um, needs that were spoken about previously.
14:55:34 You can go ahead, Cindy.
14:55:41 For the last kind of big bucket we wanted to talk about with just
14:55:43 communication and, you know,
14:55:45 This is probably, uh, you know,
14:55:47 Of course.
14:55:56 Type of moment for, um,
14:55:58 school leaders that we just really think that it's sometimes when
14:56:00 everything is coming together and there's a lot of intensity of
14:56:02 circumstance and I'm concerned for students and families and teachers.
14:56:05 It's really important to just make sure that you understand the need
14:56:09 for some real basic.
14:56:10 Um,
14:56:11 Kind of tenets around communication. So transparency and efficiency,
14:56:15 positivity.
14:56:19 In communication with all of your stakeholders,
14:56:21 just critically important.
14:56:23 And that is one of the things that has differentiated models of
14:56:25 success from models of greater concern.
14:56:28 As we've started to look at how our program has, um, you know,
14:56:31 at school, but I've used, our program has had success.
14:56:37 Price transparency and frequency of communication is just so critical.
14:56:40 And leaders cannot be afraid to say, I don't know right now,
14:56:42 we're still evolving that answer.
14:56:43 This is the best answer I can give for you.
14:56:50 We have to announce challenges and be kind of active listeners to our
14:56:53 constituencies and admit that there are going to be areas of
14:56:56 change.
14:56:57 And the answer that we can give you today is the best answer that we
14:56:59 have, but that we're going to keep.
14:57:01 Um, student needs and family needs and teacher needs.
14:57:03 In our view.
14:57:04 As you make any decisions moving forward.
14:57:06 Um, you know,
14:57:07 families need communications to be able to be successful and to
14:57:10 support their students.
14:57:11 This looks like, and, you know,
14:57:12 referencing back to the National Standards of Quality for online programs.
14:57:21 You know,
14:57:22 handbooks are referenced as a real important aspect of quality on my
14:57:25 programming.
14:57:26 So create policy around what is expected of your students and your
14:57:30 teachers and your online learning program.
14:57:31 And make sure that your students and families have communications
14:57:34 specific to student and family support.
We have sent out a slew of information to families. Some things as simple as tips sheets, like how do I start my day? What are the five things I do when I go into my course every day, um, FAQ documents for administrators and for parents. So. You know, change your language to make sure that you're meeting the technical skill and the experience level of the user who's going to interact with that document. And host office hours or help desk that's generic and just available for any students that might be struggling. For parents that don't know what to do. Um, provide organizational templates for students. Um, you know, oftentimes we've heard from families that. And it's helpful for them to kind of unblur the line between parents and learning coach, because parents have had to inadvertently take on a much greater role and their students' learning over this past. Uh, eight or eight or nine months, and that can sometimes create a lot of tension in the environment. Especially we work mostly in the high school and age range. And, you know, kids don't want their parents to be their teacher or their principal. So give them some tips and tools to be able to help us. Um, families have some structure and really, um, keep that balanced. Um, and then, you know, take advantage of. Data that you have in your system. Grade data. Login data information about how students are engaging with your program and leverage that information into. System standard communications to families over communicate with them about student progress. Don't leave things until term marking period updates. Um, and then the last thing is to just think like a PR firm, um, besides positivity and clarity and honesty and integrity in your messaging, um, realize that, especially just with the volume of things that have come in for families and families may need to hear something four to six times before it really sinks in to them. So don't be afraid to overshare and over-communicate with them. Um, and one of the other tips, and this is something that, um, you know, depending upon how you use different systems may or may not be available to you, but, you know, make sure you really understand that data that's available in your,
14:59:50 um,
14:59:51 Communications platform so that you can see, we have a.
14:59:54 Pretty mature platform where we're able to see if families open and
14:59:56 read emails that we send. If they're opening attachments,
14:59:59 if they have, um,
15:00:00 You know, been delivered.
15:00:01 If they're taking advantage of this kind of data centered.
15:00:03 Um,
15:00:04 communications strategy is we'll also help you better target families
15:00:07 that may or may not be engaging with the messages that you're
15:00:09 spending. And I think that we're down in time.
15:00:12 So I'm going to wrap that up.
15:00:13 But thank you.
15:00:14 So.
15:00:20 I'll turn it over to Terri,
15:00:21 but I want to thank the panelists for trying to answer the questions
15:00:23 as we went through. I know we had a lot to say,
15:00:25 so make sure that your question does get in and we'll be happy to
15:00:28 respond to those after, after the presentation. So Terri,
15:00:30 we took you right up to the end.
15:00:33 Thank you for doing that. I am so grateful to all of you.
15:00:35 You all amaze me and the highlighting the work of all of the educator
15:00:38 heroes,
15:00:40 those that are on our panel and those that are working in your States,
15:00:42 it's really an.
15:00:43 An amazing time.
15:00:46 So we hope you'll all watch for the link to this archive. And, the panelists have agreed
to answer those questions, as Cindy said. So we've got to be part of the archive and I put the
link to the VLLA and the chat to, if you dive right in there and dig into some of those resources
as well. Thank you all! Keep up the great work and don't be disheartened. Good things are
happening. We've heard about a lot of them today. Thanks all.