

**To the uninformed, teachers have it easy—summers off and out of school before most workers finish 9 to 5 jobs. Teachers know how much extra time, planning, and professional development is involved.**

This summer, in addition to gleefully planning hands-on lessons marking the return to normalcy, you might also want to plan for some activities that anticipate the impact of more than a year of learning in isolation.

### RECONNECTING

The “year of weird” is going to take some UNDOING. In planning for next year, the counselors at my school asked each staff member to create a video of 1 minute or less so that students could learn about the staff. Everyone introduced themselves and shared something students would relate to or remember. We met the principal’s dog, the science teacher at his son’s soccer game, and me, the art teacher crafting with her daughter. This was truly about the ordinary activities we might have in common. We used Flipgrid, and most people filmed it with their cell phones. High production values were discouraged.

Remember, it is possible that more than half of your population—your 6th and 7th graders—have never set foot in your building. Usual 6th-grade angst of “Will I be able to find all of my classes?” and “Can I open my locker?” will only be intensified. Even if you cannot do a school-wide campaign, perhaps you might record a video message on your own and send it out to students and their families during the first week, if not before. You might even tell them why you are doing it—to help ease their anxiety about returning to

school by letting them know their teacher cares and is approachable. Parents will surely appreciate that you recognize their kid’s unique needs this year.

This new school year will also be a great time for collaborative art projects. Despite our best efforts to engage online or from 6 feet away, our students have missed out on the socialization that occurs inside and outside of class. Video chat did not allow them to exchange numbers or emails to set up hangouts with new middle school friends.

Again, more than half your population has missed the normal socialization that comes during this transition from elementary school. The counseling department is already offering suggestions on how we might foster these much-needed interactions. Thankfully, collaborative work is nothing new in art education; we just need to reprioritize it in light of what we have all been through this year.

### POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) was a common acronym before the pandemic and may prove to be a good touchstone as we head back to the classroom. Generally, it is the idea that you “catch” students doing “good things,” the behaviors you want, and publicly reward them for it. This causes other students to exhibit these behaviors—even if the reward is only an acknowledgement that they are awesome! Where are you supposed to get the rewards? Budgets were tight before the pandemic, and they may be even tighter when we return after a year of added expenses and minimal fund-raising. It’s time to get creative and find low- or no-cost rewards—charging your cell phone, listening to music with earbuds, a positive call home, and a chance to eat lunch with the teacher are all on my reward menu. I use an online resource/app called ClassDojo, and

students earn points as a table team. We celebrate payday every 2 weeks, and the four winning team members get to “cash out” their points or bank them for future use. We blank the scoreboard on payday and start fresh every 2 weeks. Students get points for cleaning up, answering questions, and getting “caught” being KIND. If you are familiar with this app, you will recognize the genius of using teams. You don’t have to put in all the kids’ names, and you can just copy the class list for all your classes. Another advantage is that it allows kids of different ability levels—ELL, special education, gifted—to succeed as part of a team. Do you have a CREATIVE free reward? Please share it with others on the NAEA Middle Level Facebook page or on NAEA’s Collaborate. And yes, two students did actually save up points to eat lunch with me. We had a pizza delivered! And all the kids thought that was COOL.

### EARLY FINISHERS

Learning digitally, despite its many disadvantages, had at least one advantage—students were able to move on when ready. As students return to the classroom, we can anticipate that some common middle school art class challenges will be amplified. How will you encourage students to dig deeper when they declare that they are finished and there is still an hour of class? They cannot simply log off from a meeting. I anticipate that I will be having many Jim Collins-inspired *Good to Great* conversions with students. So this summer I am going to work on specific, detailed rubrics for my projects to help steer kids back to creating high-quality work. In addition, I am going to work on creating self-serve activities for early finishers. If I plan well, my only challenge may be accurately navigating who can take the assignments further and who can move on. Either way, art wins! ■



**Aimee Burgamy**

*Division Director.* Art Educator, Richard Hull Middle, Duluth, GA. Tel: 770-232-3200.

Email: aimee\_burgamy@gwinnett.k12.ga.us

*Elect:* Janis Stivers Nunnally, Visual Arts Educator, Putnam County School Board, Cookeville, TN.

**Regional Directors:** *Eastern:* Hope Lord, hope\_lord@maranacook.com; *Southeastern:* Margaret Skow, megskow@gmail.com;

*Western:* Jessica Jones, jessicaejones@gmail.com; *Pacific:* Rebecca Weeks, weeksr1@nv.ccsd.net