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#ReopenStrong Equity Spotlight: Columbia Heights Education Campus (CHEC)

Spotlights

Written by Ross Cohen, AP English Language & Composition Teacher

What expectations or policies have you advocated for/set for your students and school to keep equity front and center during virtual learning?

Like many other teachers in the district, I've worked closely with our school tech expert to ensure my students have access to the hardware necessary to show up for class. Within my class, I've encouraged a policy of truth-telling, of not being content with, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote, "a single story" or easy answers.

What keeps you going during these difficult times?

My coworkers keep me going. Every day, I'm reminded that I work with some amazing people who are committed to their students' flourishing, making use of this time to examine the inequitable cracks and fissures in our education system that have been exposed by COVID-19, and actively working to fashion something better out of our old models of thinking and teaching. I hope to be worthy of being in their company.

What best practices have you leveraged in your role to ensure equity for your students in the virtual space?

Each day, I start out with an SEL discussion. Resources like *The New York Times* Learning Blog and Poem-a-Day offer opportunities for my students to express their opinions on a variety of topics and texts from diverse authors. Listening to my students bring their lived experiences to a text or a pressing issue brings me joy and ensures their voices are heard.

How have you continued to create an inclusive and educational culture in the virtual space?

Even though we're scattered throughout the District, creating a space in which students feel heard, valued, and loved remains my top priority — it just looks different this year. I encourage my students to show up however they feel comfortable: on camera, through an icon, a gif, emojis, and answers in the chat. If there's a silver lining to this, it's that I'm discovering all the ways students choose to engage with learning.

They're the online generation, and their ability to navigate this digital space is humbling and encouraging. I'm learning a lot from them. One way to promote equity is to allow for authenticity. And while we aren't in the same room, I feel as though my students are authentically here.

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