

What Are NC Schools Doing About Students Struggling With E-Learning?

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School looks a little different in North Carolina this year. As the pandemic continues, most of the hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds are empty. Many NC students are going to school through e-learning rather than in person.

Some students are thriving in this new environment. Others, however, are having a difficult time making the transition. For educators like Nicole Krisko, helping these students is a new and unique set of challenges.

New Challenges For The 2020-2021 School Year

Nicole Krisko has been teaching elementary education for twenty years. She currently teaches the students in grades three through five in the Gifted & Talented program at Pearsontown Elementary School in South Durham.



Image courtesy of [Durham Public Schools](#).

“I think the biggest challenge has just been engagement—keeping them engaged over Zoom,” said Krisko. “In the normal classroom, you’re able to walk by them or give them eye contact. With Zoom, it’s kind of hard to get their attention without calling their name. There are a lot of little cues that you can do in the classroom to keep them engaged. That’s been one of the biggest challenges for those students that aren’t engaged.”

As an elementary school teacher, Krisko’s students range from eight to 10 years old. Part of the issue, she says, is that not every student is ready to learn independently.

“They are still just little elementary school kids,” she said. “We’re putting a lot more responsibility on them in terms of independence. Some of them have really risen to the challenge and some of them, it’s been more challenging. They’re not quite ready and they might still need that guidance from all of us. That’s really been hard.”

Why E-Learning Is Difficult For Some Students

One major challenge for teachers is that no two students learn the same. Krisko says that those differences can be especially difficult to account for in an e-learning environment.

“I think it comes down to different learning styles and also different personalities,” she said. “Our extroverted students are really struggling. They’re very engaged in the lesson during Zoom because they are extroverts and they want to talk and have that interaction with people. But they’re also really struggling socially and emotionally.”



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Krisko says that she sees a different set of challenges for more introverted students.

“Our introverts may not be as much involved in the conversation and paying attention on Zoom,” she said. “However, they’re getting the lesson and they’re doing the work on their own. But I worry for them when we go back to all this social interaction. Right now they don’t have that, but they’re enjoying it because that’s more of their personality.”

Whether or not students have someone available to help them at home plays a big role, according to Krisko.

“Some parents that are at home and able to make sure their kids follow the schedule,” she said. “That has been going better than the families where some of them are at work and the kids are kind of left on their own.”

The Potential Long-Term Effects Of A “Lost Year”

Krisko says that she fears for the long-term effects that e-learning struggles might have on students in NC.

“I really worry,” she said. “Especially for the kindergartners. I hate this for them. So much of kindergarten is socializing and learning how to work with their peers. Understanding that they have to wait their turn to hear someone else talk. All of that that we just take for granted

as adults. So they're learning all of that. I really worry for long-term effects on how this is going to affect them."



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According to Krisko, schools and teachers will also need to adjust to help students recover from a "lost year."

"Academically, I think at schools we are definitely going to have to be aware," she said. "Every year when we come to school as a teacher we always look at where students are. We always have students at different levels so we have to address those needs. I think the gap just might be much larger now. We're going to have to address it and go even deeper."

How Teachers Are Helping

Despite the difficulties, teachers like Krisko across the state are working to make sure students get as much support as possible. She says that as they've gotten further into the school year, they've started to find ways to help students and their families adjust.

"We've done a lot of emailing parents and talking to parents," she said. That's been really helpful."

She says that while the initial learning curve was steep, things have smoothed out in the process.



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“In the beginning, learning all the online tools was a challenge,” said Krisko. “Now we feel like we’ve learned all those things. Parents are more aware of how we’re getting the assignments to kids and what they need to look for. It’s been working a lot better.”

However, despite the new circumstances and technology, Krisko and her colleagues throughout North Carolina are getting through the pandemic by doing what teachers have always done best: connecting with students, building relationships, and helping them succeed.

“I think making sure we’re really talking to the kids,” she said. “Because having that one-on-one interaction lets the kids know that I am watching them, I am here to help them, and that I am here to support them.”

Want to learn more about [how schools in NC are conducting e-learning](#)? Interested in a few of the [worst-case scenarios for COVID-19](#) in higher education? Stay tuned to North Carolina News Daily for more news and updates about the Tar Heel State.

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