

## Greetings from the MCNC Director

For this month's newsletter, I am proud to share insights and highlights from our interviews with three wonderful MCNC teachers. In the midst of this pandemic, these teachers exemplify resilience, commitment and ingenuity to their craft of teaching and the current and ongoing needs of their students. Their stories come from three distinct parts of the country – the San Francisco Bay Area, Greenville County in South Carolina, and New York City. Their voices and perspectives also reflect various strategies used to meet different schooling models in which students may be participating in classes through different modes like all virtual, in-person only, or hybrid of virtual and in-person learning. These teachers represent our MCNC core values of connecting and caring for students through personalized engagement and learning.

Sanet Hipolito uses new technology apps to assist students in her mathematics classroom and also leverages her "after-school" STEM project to provide real world mathematics learning, connections and applications for her students. Quentin Grant works with students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 plans and supports them in their high school and college classes through regular one-on-one student meetings and engaging his colleagues to provide additional supports for his students. Luincys Fernandez knows first-hand how hard it can be to turn cameras on in her classroom, so she created her own personalized avatar which mimics her own voice and gestures and introduced this concept to her students so they could create their own avatars in place of turning on their cameras to share and express themselves.

Enjoy reading excerpts from these teacher interviews and hope you also check out some of the 'short reads' resource links to the right. For our monthly newsletters and other MCNC-related news, please visit our [MCNC website](https://www.mcnc.us).



## Student Engagement and Strategies for Your Virtual Classroom

– Useful Short Reads –

- [\[Edutopia\] 8 Strategies to Improve Participation in Your Virtual Classroom](#)
- [\[Edutopia\] Engaging Students in Virtual Instruction with the Camera Off](#)
- [\[Edutopia\] 5 Ways to Take Some of the Distance Out of Distance Learning](#)
- [\[EdWeek\] Strategies for Engaging Students in 'Meaningful' Online Learning Experiences](#)
- [\[EdWeek\] 6 Lessons Learned About Better Teaching During the Pandemic](#)
- [\[EdWeek\] How Hybrid Learning Is \(and Is Not\) Working During COVID-19: 6 Case Studies](#)



**Sanet Hipolito**  
**Teacher, Mathematics**  
**Middle College High School**  
**Contra Costa, CA**  
<https://www.wccusd.net/middlecollege>

"I have been teaching for 16 years in our district and I also have 16 years of teaching experience in the Philippines. I teach math and seminar classes to support our students with their college courses. I usually begin my online math classes with expectations for the day and follow up and ask how students are doing by responding in the Zoom chat – I can see how they felt at the start of my class. Then, we review what we did in our last lesson and I ask students to answer the warm-up questions in the chat. The Zoom chat box allows me to see if everyone is engaged. After discussing the lessons, we summarize what we discovered and I ask students to share specific examples. The chat feature is helpful because it allows students to honestly say their feelings about a topic. On my end, I have a large computer with split screens, provided through the Donors Choose grant program – one screen shows the chat, middle screen displays my students, and the third screen has my Google slide presentation."

"When I start a discussion with my students, I encourage them to answer in chat regardless of whether they get it right or not. I try to tell them that this is just part of learning and that there is no need to be shy. I do not mention any students' names because this can discourage them from

participating if they were to share the wrong answer in the chat. Through this encouragement, 100% of my students participate during my classes. At the end of class, I check their understanding and gauge how they feel about the lesson for the day. If there is still confusion from some students, I address it by providing another example or two. You cannot just ignore their comments. If they are opening up and sharing their feelings with you and you don't take any action, they will not be willing to share their understanding. It's important to me that students feel like they are part of every activity we do during our Zoom class, as much as possible."

"Some resources I use to engage my students:

- 1) Delta Math is a free website where I can assign problem exercises. If students get the answer wrong, a step-by-step solution is provided and my students enjoy the immediate feedback. For assignments, I allow them to choose a partner to work with in a breakout room during class and I'll often join in and guide students who may need help. Breakout groups help to build a community of students that collaborates and learns together.
- 2) Videos lessons provided with our textbook. I incorporate videos in my lesson plan to instruct and detail out how to answer math problems and my students say that these lesson videos have been helpful. Some of my students even prefer to watch the lesson video rather than reading an example in their math book.
- 3) CLASSKICK allows me to see the screens of all my students and I can help them as they are working. It requires a one

year subscription and it has been effective in helping me see how engaged my students are during class, especially when they do not have their videos on. I prepare lessons on CLASSKICK and share the screen of my slides and provide an activity that will allow students to write on their screens. I can monitor all my students while working on their screens and provide feedback when needed. I can also interact with and instruct individual students. 4) Through Google Classroom, I share my Google slides, whiteboard discussions, handouts and other material resources. This is also the place where students submit assignments and I can make comments on their work and they comment back. Students usually respond immediately and I try to do the same because I want them to know their feedback is important to me."

"I oversee our robotics program and have been the school advisor for MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement) for 14 years. The program aims to prepare students for college and careers that propel student diversity and achievement in STEM. Students explore and create projects such as bridges, coding and machine balls, and compete with other public high schools. This year we have 62 students and it's been great to see them get together and actively engage outside of their classes. We have 3 teams that will work on the 'National Human Design Challenge' to create projects that will help individuals or groups who are experiencing some type of inequity."



**Quentin Grant**  
**Teacher, Special Education**  
**Brashier Middle College**  
**Simpsonville, SC**

<http://www.brashiermiddlecollege.org/>

“This is my 20th year teaching but my third year at Brashier. I’m also the services coordinator at my school, so I handle all the IEPs and 504s, and teach half the day. We have more of a resource than inclusion model, so I get to work with my own students and focus on building relationships. We were fully virtual for the first month of this school year, and then went to a hybrid model for students who wanted to return in-person. At the end of November, we started in-person school four days a week. A group of students remained fully virtual and so I may have an in-person class of six students and additional students on Zoom.”

“Last year when we shut down and went fully remote, I started using Google forms every week which my kids had to fill out. Questions included: What do you have this week? What do you need to get accomplished? Do you need a one-on-one meeting with me this week? I had relationships with all the kids so that was helpful. I would email and do Zooms with them individually every other week at a time they chose to meet. Honestly, we were all kind of flying by the seat of our pants at that time so there was a lot of grace involved! So, when we started this school year, it almost felt normal because I started every class with Zoom expect one class with all my students in-person.”

“I do a Zoom for every class and kids hate it in the morning but I tell them, ‘I want to see you, even only for a few minutes because I want to know you’re okay and if you need anything.’ I think we all managed to make it, but we’ve lost a lot of the relationship element and that’s what I love the most – working with my students and seeing them develop. All my kids are required to meet with me twice a week as part of my general rule on attendance. It helps me to know what’s going on with them, be it for a few minutes or an hour, which is especially important for the kids I serve.”

“As far as student accommodations, my fellow teachers have been great. The common small group accommodation setting is provided when my students take their tests online, and for other accommodations like reading to students who are not in-person, we do Google reading right there and then through the Chromebooks issued to all students. I also have students get on Zooms with me at separate times so I can read material to them. Some accommodations do not apply as well virtually, like preferential seating, but we’ve been able to adjust things as best as possible.”

“I work with students who may not want to do the work to begin with, or may be having a hard time completing the work correctly; therefore, student engagement doesn’t feel too different than before. For kids who are struggling, I set up one-on-one Zooms and if it’s hard to connect with them, I reach out to their parents. Then, during our one-on-one, I help set goals for the

student and share my screen so we can review their grades and discuss what may be going on, and I try to bridge the between the student and the teacher. Sometimes, the student may not want to talk to the teacher and I remind them that this is why I am here to help with that. We develop a plan, same as if I were meeting with them in-person, and discuss the assignments we may need to turn in and a timetable to get the work completed.”

“Some of my students take college courses and our college liaison is awesome and I reach out to her if my kids may need help. She handles scheduling and knows a lot of the professors. But my students are required to go through the college services department just like any other college student. I’ll review their schedules and email all the students who are taking college courses, and their parents at the start of the year and provide information for the college services department. I check in with my kids regularly but I don’t have access to Blackboard which has their college grades. This has always been a bit challenging, which makes meeting regularly with kids even more important now.”

“I don’t have something earth shattering or super great to share, but it’s just the simple things that can really make a difference during these times. I’m a relationship person. I think everything is based on building relationships which can be harder in a virtual world but we have to remember it’s all about relationships!”



**Luincys Fernandez**  
**Teacher, Science**  
**International High School**  
**Long Island City, NY**

<https://www.ihsnyc.org/>

“This is my first year at International, LaGuardia. Before this, I was at Bronx International and have been teaching for 15 years. I teach chemistry and biology. You asked me to talk about the Avatar strategy I’ve been using to help address the issue that many teachers are having with students not turning on cameras during online classes. I did a survey with my students about this and many of them responded that it would be appropriate to turn on cameras in the examples I included, but it was very clear to me that they would not feel comfortable doing this on a daily basis. Some of our students have a lot going on in their homes. I was meeting one-on-one with a student where we usually have our cameras on, but this time, he turned the camera and mic off and on a lot. I could hear his siblings in the background. I told him not to worry about it and that I myself have others around and called my children over to meet my student so he would feel more comfortable knowing that he’s not the only one going through a situation like this. So, this is a strategy I use regularly – not prohibiting my own children from being in the background which alone has helped students feel more comfortable being on camera. Another thing I started was

rather than asking them to turn on their cameras at the start of class, I would start by pulling them out into breakout rooms and meeting with them individually so they would feel more comfortable. Then, they could choose to turn their cameras on or off in their breakout student groups for the discussion time on something we may have read or to answer a focus question. Over Christmas break, I was still thinking about how to encourage students to turn on their cameras and that’s when I came across concept of using an Avatar.”

“I teach 9th and 10th graders, and it’s their first year with us for some or their first or second year in this country, so they may feel uncomfortable speaking English. I would pull those students into breakout rooms and prep them for the discussion groups so they could still participate confidently. And that’s what I was thinking about when I was creating my Avatar – students who would say no to turning on their camera no matter what. When we returned after winter break, I started classes with my Avatar rather than my video camera and didn’t mention anything about it. The students were commenting, trying to figure out if it was really me behind the Avatar. I replied, ‘Can’t you recognize my voice at this point!?’ I taught with my Avatar that entire first week and the only thing I said to them was that I wanted to see the cool Avatar that they could create themselves so that when we’re doing more presentations in the spring term, they don’t feel uncomfortable

turning on their cameras since they can use the Avatars instead. We started with volunteers. The challenge is that a lot of our kids don’t have their own computers and are using the school computer which doesn’t permit the Avatar app to be download. I’ve been working with our tech person to find a solution around this. In the meantime, some of the kids have been able to create their own Avatars and are using them in class. The kids love it and get into fun and deep discussions about how closely the Avatars resemble the person. The Avatar mimics your real-time movements, like when I talk, smile, blink my eyes or make hand gestures so it’s not just a static image there.”

“Many of our students were already dealing with a lot and the pandemic just made things harder for them. I have a little sign in my virtual classroom that says ‘Giving up is not an option.’ My students know what it means, because they know my story. I’ve shared with them that I never had an option to give up and I never give up on them and therefore, they cannot give up on themselves. I keep telling my students, ‘I was one of you. I came here on the age of 12 and unable to speak English, but I too graduated from an international school in New York, the Manhattan International High School.’”

