CLASSROOM CHRONICLES

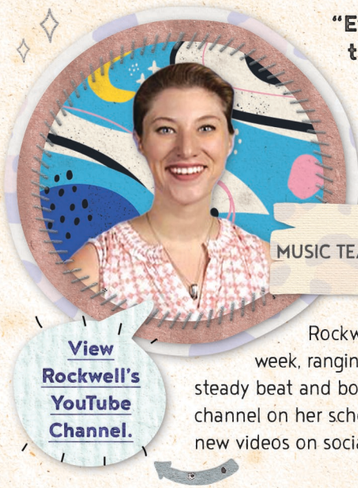
CREATIVE CONNECTION

How Four Louisiana Educators Engage Students Amid COVID-19 School Closures

DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION
Louisiana Believes

Louisiana school facilities are currently closed in response to the ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, but this has not stopped educators from remotely engaging their students. This month's blog spotlights four Louisiana educators who have found creative ways to connect.

Since school facilities closed March 16, **Rockwell and Felt**, who are sisters, each experienced a lack of closure and recognized their students likely felt the same way. To ease these feelings, they each began filming, posting lessons to YouTube so students could access them at any time.



"Everyone has access to their own voice and creativity, so we created lessons that enabled us to connect with our students online."

JUDY ROCKWELL
MUSIC TEACHER, J.F. GAUTHIER ELEMENTARY
ST. BERNARD PARISH

View Rockwell's YouTube Channel.

Rockwell currently posts one video a week, ranging from vocal warmups to practicing steady beat and body percussion. She advertises her channel on her school webpage, and she shares her new videos on social media.

SARA FELT
ART TEACHER, JOE DAVIES ELEMENTARY
ST. BERNARD PARISH

Felt hosts an art class every Wednesday at 4:00 p.m., and the projects change every week. She chooses projects utilizing common household supplies, like flour or vegetable oil or crayons.

View Felt's YouTube Channel.

Word of their resources quickly spread beyond St. Bernard Parish, with viewers of all ages and from across the state. The videos have racked up over 19,000 hits so far.

The videos provide instruction, but more importantly, the sisters explain, they provide comfort.

"I was finishing my last semester of student teaching when [Hurricane] Katrina hit," Rockwell recalled. "At 23 years old, I practiced so much and gave everything I had to that last semester. You see, even if all your material possessions are stripped away, the ability to do music is one of those human rights that can never be taken from you. I found so much comfort and peace knowing that my music could never be taken from my brain or my heart. I did not create this channel so that my students could sing perfectly in tune or get through a certain amount of exercises in their band books. I created the channel so they would know I care, and that I'm still here, and that music is still here."

Felt agreed, noting creative outlets are healthy for the body and mind, particularly in times of stress.

"You're exercising your brain while also releasing physical and emotional tension," Felt said. "Art therapy is a real thing, and I believe that's the purpose I serve for many of my students."

"I WANT ALL OF MY KIDS TO KNOW I'M THINKING ABOUT THEM ALL THE TIME, AND I WANT THEM TO KNOW HOW PROUD I AM OF THEM."

"Art is a release, and I know so many of us are carrying so much anxiety right now. I want to help if I can to relieve some of this anxiety."

Catherine Bertrand's virtual lessons are designed to teach more than guidebook units; they also aim to build good character.

She uses an app to relay messages and lessons to parents and students. With the focus of continuing to connect with her students and maintain face-to-face interactions, Bertrand posts videos of herself reading to her students and asks that they read back to her, allowing them the freedom to choose what they read. She does this to maintain as much learning normalcy as possible.

"Everyone, including and maybe more so children, are uneasy about all of the change," said Bertrand. "Everyone needs to do their part to protect each other and help with all aspects of health. A healthy child must also be supported socially and emotionally. I try to encourage greatness to the best of my ability."

Parents and students alike have praised her efforts.

"Ms. Bertrand has gone above and beyond to ensure that her students have the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in school," shared a parent. "She consistently posts assignments during school closures to make sure that her students don't fall behind and that they continue to learn about and practice good character."

CATHERINE BERTRAND
4TH GRADE TEACHER, EUNICE ELEMENTARY
ST. LANDRY PARISH

Jessica O'Neal strives to support her students academically, socially, and emotionally.

In addition to regular instruction, O'Neal creates a **"Just For Fun" task** for each day of the week. The tasks give the students a stimulating activity that also helps their families.

Monday, for example, is "**Makeover Monday**," which consists of giving students a task centered on organization. Recent tasks have included students organizing books, toys, or a closet for example, and sending O'Neal before and after pictures.

On "**Teacher Tuesday**," O'Neal holds a one-on-one Zoom call with every student.

For "**What's Cooking Wednesday**," students explore their kitchens by cooking a meal with their families, and on "Family Friday," students spend time with their families and participate in a class Zoom call.

"There is nothing more rewarding than seeing my students and their families enjoying time together," said O'Neal. "The importance of a parent-teacher partnership creates the foundation for a lifetime of success for a student!"

JESSICA O'NEAL
2ND GRADE TEACHER, LEGACY ELEMENTARY
BOSSIER PARISH