What is your organization's greatest success story in 2020?

Osseo ABE was able contact over 95% of its student population when the pandemic started through phone calls, emails and/or mailings. While many of these students had to withdraw from school due to family/work/community obligations or changes, we are pleased that we were able to connect with them to share resources, let them know what services we were able to offer, and to let them know that we cared about them and wanted them to stay safe until we are able to resume "regular" programming.

One big success we have seen is the rapid adaptation of our students to an online environment, even though our bread and butter service model for YEARS has been in person instruction. A key to that has been the willingness of our teachers to be flexible and creative; if a student cannot upload an assignment, they can take a picture of it and text it, or send it in an email. We had one student who was dialing into class on his drive home from work; the teacher was able to, on the fly, adapt some of the work to allow for a "call in" student to participate in the conversation even though he could not see the reading or the "board."

I think that an internal success story is the change in perspective for some of our teachers. One teacher in particular started in March trying to print and mail materials to all of her students because they "couldn't" get the content online. She moved to a growth mindset as the months of instruction wore on, and now all of her students are able to be fully engaged with the class materials on their phones, tablets, or computers electronically. She has said that she will never go back to the amount of copying that she did pre-pandemic!

One additional success has been that we recently were able to work with our district IT team and SiD staff to create district email addresses for all of our students. This was a long term project that happened to get a "boost" from the clear need for access to Google Suite (hard to do without a gmail account, or in some cases, an email at all). As we move forward, all of our students will have a school district email which will allow them to access the GSuite and more easily access Google Meet and Google Classroom.

How does your organization address issues of equity in your community?

This is such a tough question; at the larger organizational level, there is a district policy on equity and we have an equity department. At the program (ABE) level, we have an equity team and we host regular meetings on equity work. This work, while admirable, has not really had the desired impact in our classrooms and communities that we would hope for. Equity work is, in part a personal journey of understanding and learning, and there is still resistance to the work at nearly every level of the district for a variety of reasons.

From a more practical standpoint, the move to online/remote learning in our community in particular has been devastating when it is coupled with the uncertainty of work schedules, work options, childcare, personal health and safety, and the current political and social environment for many of our students (93% of whom report being POC/Indigenous). Equity in the context of

the machinations of a large, publicly funded institution has not had an easy road. We are limited, both practically and in our imaginations, by contract language, past practice, security (online data privacy) concerns, finances, and certainly health and safety concerns to be able to provide responsive programming that TRULY meets the needs of our families.

In our district, ABE is an arm of Community Education, which takes it out of the mainstream technology access and implementation planning process. We are not given the resources to provide one-on-one technology devices for our students, internet hotspots or access to district tools like Schoology, Clever, or Seesaw. Our teachers and students have, for years, been cobbling together access to free resources.

This is not to say that there not any shining examples of great work being done. The teachers in ABE use the CLEAR model (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFyKfZukgYg) in their lessons and work with students daily. They have challenged themselves and each other to review texts, teaching materials and procedures to ensure that they are equitable and responsive to the needs of the community.

What strategies has your organization employed to address digital inclusion? What has worked or has not worked well? And why do you believe that it has or has not worked?

We have used Google Meet (the district approved tool) to offer online instruction; the platform can be used with a phone, a tablet or a computer. Nearly 80% of our students do most of their class participation on their phone. We have encouraged students to work with building management (in the large apartment complexes) to get building wide wifi (or access in the community/common area spaces), and have given out fliers and contact information on low cost internet and technology options. These tools have been moderately well received, but we don't know to what extent students are actually following through with them. We are also distributing the laptops we had for classroom use to students. We did a tech question/survey with them to ensure that they knew that they would need access to internet, even if it was at a coffee shop or local space. This has been moderately successful as well, but as fewer and fewer public institutions (libraries, community centers, etc) are open, this is a tool that is not practical at this time.

How has your organization reached clients/participants since March? Do you have recommendations for adoption of services or community outreach strategies?

We have used Remind.com as our text app, and that has been fairly successful as an outreach tool. The biggest challenge with the app is that the student must "opt in" to getting messages, and conceptually that is hard to explain to many of our limited English students. The app does have the ability to translate messages into other languages, which also helps. The school district as a whole uses Talking Points, but the subscription does not cover ABE students. Most of the district tools rely on students being entered into the district system – Osseo uses Synergy

– and of course, ABE uses SiD. So we have trouble linking our students to some of those features. We also use our support staff to make phone calls to students. The biggest challenges there are that we are working from home, and so staff are using Google Voice numbers, which students do not recognize and do not pick up. We have worked to tell students that this is what we are doing, and have some limited success in getting students to answer our calls this way.

What recommendation do you have for organizations to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or expand digital access? Or what would you recommend to your organization if you could return to March and coordinate a response?

I would go back WAY before March ☺ In a perfect world, we would have focused a lot of attention building in staff expectations on technology instruction specific to online instruction and communication instead of NSDL. While the skills in NSDL are helpful for a long term future for a student, we would require all teachers to show their students how to use Remind.com; how to use Google Meet, and how to access Google Classroom on their personal devices and rely less on the computer labs (which are great, but don't let students practice on their own devices).

I also think that, for our (and probably other) school districts, we need to figure out to get adult learners access to technology to do learning outside of school on something other than their phone. While our learners are resilient, creative and full of great ideas, there is no question that being able to see something on a computer screen is educational advantageous as compared to using only a small phone screen.

What is the greatest barrier to digital access in your community? What are other barriers? How do resources in your community ameliorate barriers to digital acces? And what further support is needed to achieve digital equity?

See the reply above; our students are in the grey area of being students who reach academic goals in our school system while being on the fringes of that system. We should be providing access to technology and tech training for the teachers and students in ABE as we do for the K12 population.

Other barriers include high mobility in some of our students – it is wearing to set up and change internet providers every time you move; we also have some parts of our district which do not have access to high speed internet service (parts of Rogers and Dayton for example). Money is always an issue as well – especially when an economic crisis hits the community you serve disproportionally as this one is; not all of our students have internet access, even if they can get access to a device.

What adaptation that your organization has made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic do you believe will remain after the public health environment improves? Why do you believe these adaptations will prove permanent?

I think that as we move forward, we will work on building a true online class option; there is a segment of our community (and of our teachers) who have thrived in the opportunity to do online instruction – it would be an adaptation of our current adaptation, as we are not currently doing this.

Our pathways to prosperity grant project has been very successful online, and I believe we could continue to offer that online; it is a good alignment for students who may be looking to move onto college classes, many of which have had online options for several years.

We also developed a volunteer reading program which pairs students with a volunteer to do weekly readings and check-ins. While many of these students want to be in in-person class, they would also like to continue to meet with the volunteer remotely in addition. I think that this option will prove to be permanent, since we have had the opportunity to develop the program and test it out during the pandemic and it will be an offering that we can continue to provide without additional budget constraints moving forward.