

So many apps, so little time

By Jessica Garcia
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Former kindergarten teacher Kari Pryor is thrilled that Carson City's teachers have the tools now to create the interactive learning environment to keep their students engaged at home in such a brief time after their training.

"Anything you want now

that exists, you can replicate from a classroom," Pryor said Monday. "The only thing that you can't replicate is that warm, fuzzy hug the teacher would give. But our teachers are connecting with our learners in every way possible online and building relationships."

Pryor, Carson City School District's professional learning coordinator, frequently is among the first

faces new hires will see. She's responsible for ensuring teachers swiftly are assimilated into the district culture and feel supported as they learn how to help students at the primary or secondary levels, whether they've transferred from another district or they're just starting off their career.

This year, with COVID-19, Pryor's role in instructional implementation became drastically different and demanding. With eight days before Monday's start of school to acquaint teachers with Carson City's hybrid model, there was a pressing task at hand to train K-12 staff members and get them comfortable in teaching in a blended traditional and online setting.

"It's been this insurmountable task what this hybrid learning program looks like, right?" Pryor said.

Just to help get the teachers comfortable with the technology itself meant giving some of them access

to devices, software or apps they didn't already know about. Those who teach younger learners didn't have laptops or tablets. Many never needed them before, Pryor said. Now, 100 percent of the district's students have Chromebooks in K-12 as announced last week, which meant the teachers needed them, too.

Primary teachers working with kindergarteners through second-graders took a series of three trainings in three afternoons learning how to engage with them asynchronously, or when they're independently learning.

"I give those primary teachers all the credit in the world because to try to navigate those 30 young learners online and get them all looking at you at the same time and not wanting to show you their cat or their dog or their baby brother or sister, kudos to them," she said. "They are entertaining."

Secondary teachers have been using Google

Carson teachers adapt even in professional development

Classroom. But there is a plethora of other tools that staff members also dived into with the district's third-party vendors, including its EdTech team, who hosted the Google trainings. Pryor said staff learned how to use the Jamboard digital whiteboard, Zoom, Screen-castify, ParentSquare and more. Pryor said a survey distributed to the district's approximately 500 teachers identified the skills and software they most needed the training in or wanted the time dedicated to, which helped.

While some data is still being processed now that the professional development has been completed for additional opportunities, overall, Pryor said it was successful.

"You don't know what you really don't know yet at the beginning," she said, adding there will be opportunities for refreshers.

Asked whether screen fatigue might be a concern for students as the online portions are used heavily

for students along the way, she emphasized teachers will make sure to incorporate traditional reading and assignments into their curriculum, and the goal is to make sure students are not spending more than two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half hours of screen time per day for their grade level on their remote learning days.

"We also have an amazing partnership with the library and we'll be encouraging families to check out books so kids won't be reading books online," she said.

Pryor, who has been in education for 26 years, seven of which have been as an instructional coach, said she remains proud of Carson City's staff.

"Our teaching staff is amazing," she said. "I think our teachers have just risen to the occasion. ... They won't let anyone fail because it reflects poorly on everyone. Carson City School District really is a family and they want to see everyone succeed."

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