MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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I am a teacher of French in Montgomery County, Maryland, and the Resource Teacher for World Languages at Takoma Park Middle School. I've been teaching French for 25 years at the university, high school, and middle school level.

The overnight switch to distance learning created a steep learning curve for teachers. Despite its challenges, some elements of distance learning became beneficial for all students, and in particular, for students with disabilities. In our district, teachers generally present content through Google Slides and teacher generated videos. Students progress through slides at their own pace and can watch videos several times for comprehension needs. This is especially helpful for a World Language or ESOL student. Unfortunately, this flexibility is not always possible in an in-person classroom setting. Students with disabilities often miss parts of instruction or directions because their brains process information differently from their peers. However, Zoom classes allow students to type questions in the “chat” bar for immediate feedback and clarification by the teacher.

In my school, some World Languages teachers are having students come to Zoom conversation in groups of 6-8 students. While in-person classes ideally have students working in small groups, the teacher can't be in every breakout session for the entire period. With Zoom, teachers can schedule these mini-classes of 15 minutes and give students more individual attention. Also, in my district, many teachers are using the Canvas platform, which allows teachers to type feedback on a student assignment or record audio or video feedback. It is more effective for a teacher to record a comment than with traditional written comments in a foreign language classroom.

Switching to distance learning required immediate adaptability in how we reach students. At first, teachers were asked to post all assignments for students on Mondays. This practice proved challenging for students with executive functioning concerns. For these students, the amount of work seemed overwhelming. As a school, we adjusted by providing flexible due dates for our students. Suddenly, the workload became manageable; therefore, increasing learner participation.