

TAMMY HEATH

My name is Tammy Heath, and I have over 29 years of Pre-k-12 experience in Putnam County, FL. Currently, I teach students who are Medically Fragile with varying Intellectual Disabilities, who exhibit medical conditions such as seizures and trachea with oxygen orders.

What a journey it has been from the beginning to now. I think back to the days when my students gathered around to complete hands-on activities to now wearing face masks. Life threw us a curveball creating steep learning curves for us daily. During our first Zoom meeting, no one knew how to mute all participants at once. This created confusion, but we rolled with it and had a great lesson at the end. I have been fortunate enough to have the support of my children's parents during this shift to distant learning.

From the beginning, it was apparent that most of our parents were not proficient technology users. To combat this, we created tutorials for parents before working with the students. I spent time learning how to create private YouTube videos for students to listen to stories when their parents didn't have time to read to them. Sharing on Google Drive also allowed parents to access the documents we used in class.

I am grateful that, "Unique Learning Systems" stepped up by modifying their program to meet the accommodated needs of individual students. Our district ESE AT Coordinator also conducted twice-weekly meetings to provide support and guidance. During this time, we also noticed a spike in state-mandated initiatives to embed documents and videos with commentary and explanations promoting ease of accessibility.

At this time, we have settled in a routine and made virtual learning work. But when we do get back to something akin to normalcy? I love my children and miss interacting with them in person. However, I feel that I have connected so much more frequently and deeply with my students and parents with this virtual format.

With being "in their homes," these children have been more relaxed and displayed a different side of their personalities. We also noticed a huge spike in parents opening up. I fear this will be lost. I have always been proud of my relationships with my families but now I see it could be even deeper. I hope that a similar hybrid format will continue the cultivation of these relationships moving forward.