



Classrooms as Online Monitoring Centers: Childcare and Schooling Ideas for Teachers

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It's not easy to be a working parent. Even under normal circumstances, they juggle their schedules along with that of their children and must rely on schools and extended care options to make it through each and every workday. For essential workers, it is especially tough because those are the jobs that require employees to be physically present, while other professions can offer the flexibility to work from home. And now the nation's teachers are faced with the same dilemma as are the other essential workers: where do the kids go, and how can they learn?

As school districts across the country are fervently planning for the 2020-2021 school year, educators are worried about how to be a teacher and a parent, all at once. While many schools are beginning remotely, many are also still requiring teachers to report to campus to connect with their students live through synchronous videoconferencing apps such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. This means for much of the country's educators, the kids will be at home while the parent reports to their classroom, raising childcare concerns.

The go-to answer to support these teachers and other essential workers facing the same problem would ordinarily be daycare. But there are a few problems with this plan, notably that:

- Daycares often only serve children from six weeks old through preschool;
- Childcare centers do not have technology that allows students to complete online schooling;
- Daycare places a huge unexpected financial burden on parents when before there was none.

For teachers, perhaps the biggest issue of all is the fact that many state education agencies are requiring that students attend synchronous live teaching sessions with their instructors that mimics the bell schedule at school. Even for districts that allow staff to teach from home, this means that somehow teachers who are also parents will have to somehow manage addressing their own classes virtually while supervising their own child's online attendance, at the same time. It's no wonder that many educators are contemplating resigning due to the impossibility of the situation before them!

Luckily there are some ideas that school districts and even private childcare centers or caregivers can implement to help teachers and other essential workers stay on the job while their own kids are monitored online in the safest possible way. One such strategy is opening what some schools are calling online learning monitoring stations or centers.

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Online Monitoring Centers: What are they and how they work?

One reason that many schools are unable to fully reopen is because of how large and populous they are. On many campuses, class sizes for elementary students could range from 20-30 kids, while rosters grow to 35-40 in the most tightly packed high school courses! To maintain CDC, state, and/or health guidelines, schools must reduce class size to the point where there just aren't enough teachers or space to make it happen all while the pandemic rages on in many of our nation's states and cities.

While fully reopening some schools would be considered unsafe by many medical experts, opening partially may still be an option, even if only to support the families of essential workers. This means that some campuses in a large district may be opened to a select number of kids whose families apply for them to be there. Temporarily idled district staff, such as teacher's assistants, could be trained to monitor computer labs where children are safely distanced and engaged online with their teachers. Essentially, these centers could function as a childcare solution that also facilitates a student's online learning, while still providing a safer, more socially distanced environment than the classroom could provide under normal conditions.

Some school districts have already planned to open such virtual learning labs, and are offering spots to their own staff, or children of military members or essential workers. Such a plan provides continuity with their peers at home for when school resumes face-to-face, while providing working parents in need a viable solution for both childcare and education.

If your local school or district hasn't yet considered this option, it doesn't hurt to suggest it! However, what is a working parent to do if virtual learning labs are out of the question?

Alternative Childcare Ideas for Teachers and Essential Workers



Especially for teachers, we know how tough it is for educators to take on additional unexpected expenses, such as one so high as childcare! However, if your local school district is unwilling to open some campuses to monitor online instruction, check out some of the ideas below, which include some that may be low-cost:

- **Nonprofit Groups Offering Online Monitoring Centers**

Check with your district to see if they are partnering with any community nonprofit groups that are opening online learning labs. In some locations, organizations are teaming up with schools to help keep children safe and up to date with their online coursework. This may include church programs, or organizations such as your area YMCA. Check to see if the partnership means that care will be provided at low or no cost, as it is possible these groups will offer financial aid to those families in need.

- **Check for New Childcare Programs**

Even though most traditional daycare centers offer services for preschool and below, when a need arises, businesses usually rise to the occasion. In many areas, childcare centers are creating special programs for school-aged children to help meet their needs while are schools are in session remotely. Check in your area to see what programs are

popping up, and whether they will provide access to technology. Of course, this option will certainly not be the cheapest solution on the list, but it may just prove to be a temporary fix until school transitions back to the classroom.

- **Virtual Learning Co-Ops**

If you're a working parent, or a teacher, many of your own peers are in the same exact boat when it comes to childcare! However, there are other parents who have varying work schedules or stay at home, who may be willing to help out through a virtual learning co-op. Much like a homeschooling co-op, a group of parents work together to trade responsibilities watching the kids and monitoring online learning. If you have a flexible schedule, it might be possible to work out a solution. Check with your network, and also by searching social media pages for other moms in your area.

- **Consider Hiring a Mother's Assistant**

Since the beginning of the recession, many people have lost their jobs and have been out of work. Additionally, many college students are planning to stay at home and take classes online during the fall semester. As a result, it might be possible to find a reasonably priced mother's assistant who can help with both childcare and virtual learning. Check to see who is available in your neighborhood by posting on apps such as NextDoor or Care.com to evaluate your options.

- **Host an Au Pair**

As you may already be aware, an Au Pair is usually a college student from another country that will exchange nanny services for the ability to live with the host family temporarily while attending school. One challenge to hiring an au pair during the pandemic is that au pairs who aren't already in the US are unable to travel due to the government opting to shut the borders until the end of the year.

Luckily, it is still possible to hire an au pair who is already in America using a site that matches au pairs with host families. If this seems like an idea that might fit into your family's wishes and lifestyle, search for available au pairs to learn more about getting the process started.

Many districts have opted to begin with virtual learning, while still requiring teachers to be behind the classroom desk. If this sounds like your plight, you certainly aren't alone! Check to see if your school district will offer virtual learning labs, or feel free to make a suggestion to see if it can benefit you and your colleagues! If that doesn't work, check out the options listed above. With any luck, teachers and other essential workers can find the temporary care they need to make it through the weeks and months ahead!

