

Maintaining child safety and well-being in online learning environments

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SUMMARY

Mollie Bradlee, a Foster America alum and now Deputy Director with the Colorado Department of Human Services (CO DHS), participated in a statewide collaboration to quickly create an online toolkit for teachers and school administrators in response to the state's abrupt transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE OPPORTUNITY

In the two weeks following an abrupt transition to online learning by school districts across Colorado in March 2020, CO DHS saw a 50 percent decrease in hotline calls reporting potential child abuse and neglect. Without regular face-to-face contact, CO DHS knew teachers might be struggling to identify signs of when students and their families need more support and to distinguish when serious safety concerns merit a hotline report.

THE SOLUTION

Gather a broad coalition of experts and stakeholders. Colorado quickly assembled a collaboration that included representatives from CO DHS, the state Department of Education, teachers and administrators from local school districts, and other partners.

As the manager of a Pay for Success (PFS) project to improve educational engagement for youth in foster care, Mollie was asked to be part of the coalition.

Develop content to strengthen children's connections to caring adults and identify signs of changes in children's safety and well-being. Faced with the urgency of creating a resource before the end of the school year, the coalition split into sub-groups to develop specific pieces of the toolkit. In a period of about two weeks, the collaboration developed two age-appropriate online teaching toolkits with the following goals:

- The first goal was to help teachers stay connected with their students. The toolkit offers age-appropriate journal prompts and other activities to explore students' experiences and emotions during this challenging period. These activities gave students an outlet for pandemic-related fears and frustrations, fostered supportive connections between students and teachers, and promoted social-emotional learning and growth for students.
- The second goal was to support teachers in gauging and supporting students' physical and emotional safety in an online learning environment. The toolkit provides information about potential markers of changes to students' safety and well-being and action steps teachers might take to support students' safety.

Get the word out. CO DHS, the Department of Education, and other partners announced the toolkit's availability through a variety of existing channels, including newsletters and email blasts that regularly reach school staff. Additionally, to support teachers in implementation, the coalition hosted an online conversation with teachers and created an "FAQ" document. The coalition also drafted press releases and coordinated with local news organizations.

THE RESULT

Colorado's Teacher Toolkit launched in mid-May 2020.

RESOURCES

- [Colorado's Teacher Toolkit](#)