



**HARFORD COUNTY**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NAVIGATING

A NEW YEAR

IN A NEW  
WORLD



# MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Karen Gonzalez is a 23-year veteran special educator for Harford County Public Schools. She began teaching Daily Skills at North Harford Middle School and now teaches Life Skills at Magnolia Middle School. She graduated from Joppatowne High School in 1992 and Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania in 1996 with a Bachelor of Science in Special Education. In 2005, she received her master's degree in Reading from Loyola University. At Magnolia Middle School, Ms. Gonzalez serves on the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support committee. She is a mentor to others in her department and for student interns from local colleges. Ms. Gonzalez is also a high school swim coach.

KAREN GONZALEZ

*Special Education Teacher,  
Magnolia Middle School*

JENNIFER KNOLL

*Teacher Specialist,  
Edgewood Middle School*

Jennifer Knoll is currently in her eighth year of teaching in Harford County. At Edgewood Middle School she shares her love for Earth and space science with her sixth-grade students. She earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Towson University in 2002, and a master's degree in School Improvement Leadership from Goucher College in 2019. Mrs. Knoll currently serves as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support liaison on the School Performance and Achievement team, coordinator for the Jump Start program for 6th graders, Peaceful Alternatives coordinator, and co-leader of the Ecology Club and Green School Initiative.

## ERINN RAGAN

*Fourth Grade Teacher,  
Ring Factory Elementary School*

Erinn Ragan is an educator who strives to build lasting, positive relationships not only with her students and their families, but also with her community. She earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Liberty University in 2000, and her master's in Technology from Walden University in 2009. A 20-year veteran of Harford County Public Schools, Mrs. Ragan has taught third, fourth and fifth grade; she currently teaches fourth grade at Ring Factory Elementary School. Throughout her career, Mrs. Ragan has served as a mentor teacher, grade level chair and on the School Performance and Assessment team.

Melissa Van Ruiten is in her 12th year with Harford County Public Schools. She received her graduate degree through Towson University's Master of Teaching program. Mrs. Van Ruiten has served as a classroom teacher, as well as a mentor teacher for the county. She is currently a third-grade teacher at Youth's Benefit Elementary School. In 2016, Mrs. Van Ruiten became a National Board Certified Teacher. Most recently, she completed a Master's + 30 program to achieve Administrator I certification. Mrs. Van Ruiten's favorite part of teaching is the joy of laughter found in each day.

## MELISSA VAN RUITEN

*Third Grade Teacher,  
Youth's Benefit Elementary School*

## ELIZABETH WHITE

*Social Studies Teacher,  
Harford Technical High School*  
**2020 HCPS Teacher of the Year!**

Elizabeth White is a graduate of Towson University where she received a bachelor's degree in History and Secondary Education, and a master's in Instructional Leadership. Mrs. White has been teaching in Harford County Public Schools for 12 years. She previously taught at Edgewood High School and is currently teaching at Harford Technical High School. She was the co-winner of a curriculum award in 2015 and is currently working towards National Board certification. She is dedicated to her school community through her work with the Student Government Association. Mrs. White has also served the Social Studies and Technology offices to provide professional development and in the creation of new curricula and assessments.

**I NEVER TEACH MY PUPILS;  
I ONLY ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE  
THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH  
THEY CAN LEARN.**

*Albert Einstein*

MENTAL HEALTH  
*FOR TEACHERS*

# MENTAL HEALTH FOR TEACHERS

## Tips:

- Find “Me Time”
- Exercise
- Set realistic expectations
- Communicate
- Turn off the technology
- Create a workspace
- Showcase the positives
- Rest

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### Find “Me Time”

Find time to do things that you like to do. Be purposeful with this by adding it to your daily plans. Join a club or group that share similar interests and if you can't find one, start your own! This could be a Book Club, Art Club, or Fantasy Football Team!

2

### Exercise

Try to incorporate exercise into your weekly routine. According to the American Heart Association, 60 minutes of exercise a day helps:

- Lower blood pressure.
- Decrease LDL “bad” cholesterol in your blood.
- Improve blood sugar.
- Reduce feelings of stress.
- Control body weight.
- Improve quality of sleep and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.
- Improve memory and reduce the risk of dementia and depression.
- Make you feel good about yourself.

3

### Set realistic expectations

The perfect teacher does not exist, because no one is perfect. Do not spend too much time planning or grading. Set goals for yourself and stick to them. If you need to grade outside of the work day, set a timer and don't work past it.

4

### Communicate

Interacting with stakeholders is so important. Find ways to include families in the learning experience. This could be through Forms, newsletters, emails, or phone calls. You will be surprised at how much this can help refine your practice. Communicating with colleagues is just as important. Why recreate the wheel or work alone when you could collaborate, delegate tasks, and ultimately relieve some of your own workload?

5

### Turn off the technology

This has never been more important than this school year. Working from home will sometimes feel like you are never “off.” That is why it is so important to set a time each day to turn off your technology. This could mean closing your email and It's Learning so that you do not feel required to respond to incoming messages.

# MENTAL HEALTH FOR TEACHERS, CONT.

## 6 Create a workspace

Having a place in your home to work is important in order to help differentiate your work life from your home life. Try to find an area that is separate from where others are working. If possible, choose a room with a door that can be closed to avoid interruptions during synchronous lessons. If you live with others, consider creating something to let others know you are unavailable. This could be a spotlight at your door, red means don't enter, green means come on in, and yellow could mean, "I'm working, but you can come in for something quick."

## 7 Showcase the positives

Patting yourself on the back is just as important as highlighting great student work. When you are proud of a lesson or activity share it with colleagues or your administration. Take time to reflect on what went well so that you can put those practices to use again! When your students do well, take pride in that and celebrate with them!

## 8 Rest

Doctors recommend that adults get seven or more hours of sleep per night. This can be difficult if stress is keeping you awake. Keep a notebook next to your bed to write down notes to help get them off of your mind. Clear your mind with meditation, soft music, or reading. Lastly, try to utilize steps 1-7 throughout the day to help manage your stress and workload so that they do not overwhelm you at night.

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## HELP WITHIN HCPS:

The *Employee Assistance Program* (EAP) offers several resources to help you. All discussions with the EAP professionals are confidential and there is no out-of-pocket cost to you. These services include:

- Counseling Services-up to 8 sessions for you and your dependents.
- Family Caregiving Services-Referrals and information about a variety of family matters.
- Legal Services-a 30 minutes consultation to help with basic legal questions.
- Financial Services-a consultation with a financial consultant.
- Convenience Services-referrals for conveniences services.
- Online Tools and Information-an interactive, web-based self-service solution.

For more information about your Employee Assistance Program please contact via:

Phone: 866-795-5701 | Website: [www.EAPHelpLink.com](http://www.EAPHelpLink.com) | Company Code: HCPS

The *CareFirst ShareCare App* is available for anyone with HCPS medical insurance. ShareCare can track sleep, steps, etc. for those wearing a device that is connected through their phone. ShareCare also shares nutritional and fitness resources, and even meditation videos!

Visit <https://www.carefirst.com/sharecare/> for more information. Log in as you would for Carefirst.com's website login.

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# MENTAL HEALTH FOR TEACHERS, CONT.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### [TherapistAid.com](#)

*Offers a variety of tools including worksheets to help with stress, anxiety, depression, and more. You can filter according to topic to find recourses to help you.*

### [Virusanxiety.com](#)

*A website that comes from the Shine App. It provides support to relieve stress and anxiety. The website offers expert help, free meditations, and internet sources to help you recenter and take a break.*

### [TeachersPayTeachers.com](#)

*A great place to go if you are feeling overwhelmed. Why reinvent the wheel when you don't have to? Check with your school to see if they can purchase resources for you to use.*

### [BreathforChange.com](#)

*A website that is geared towards helping educators and families to be more mindful. They provide free yoga videos, trainings, and conversations for educators.*

### [Prioritizing Well-Being: Mental Health Strategies for Teachers and Students](#)

*A Webinar that is available for free to educators. This webinar explores tips and strategies for helping your well-being during teaching, both virtually and in the classroom.*

**IT'S THE TEACHER THAT  
MAKES THE DIFFERENCE,  
NOT THE CLASSROOM.**

*Michael Morpurgo (author)*

MENTAL HEALTH  
*FOR STUDENTS*



# MENTAL HEALTH FOR STUDENTS

## Supporting Students During Distance Learning

### Tips:

- Stick to a routine
- Keep it simple
- Stay in contact
- Build relationships
- Be creative
- Be mindful
- Take care of yourself

### 1 Stick to a routine

Providing a routine, even during Distance Learning, provides structure for students. Mimicking parts of a typical school day, whenever possible, will help students develop expectations for the school day. Consider starting each day, or class, with a class meeting to give guidelines for your time together.

### 2 Keep it simple

For some students, not being in a physical classroom to ask questions may be stressful. To alleviate this stress, keep directions concise and easy to understand. Ensure that materials are accessible and easy to read. Consider the needs of all of your students. Perhaps some students would benefit from recorded directions, or having a text read aloud. Also keep in mind that students' comfort level with technology varies. Provide opportunities for students to ask questions about how to utilize the learning platform.

### 3 Stay in contact

Schedule regular check-ins with your students. Consider having informal "office hours" where students and parents can contact you with questions or concerns. Keep a contact log to ensure that you are regularly communicating with each of your students.

### 4 Build relationships

Building relationships with teachers and classmates may be particularly challenging for students when done virtually. Provide opportunities for students to get to know you, and each other. Make time for students to talk to you one-on-one, perhaps through phone calls or an online meeting. Also allow time for students to connect with one another using breakout sessions, or appropriate social media.

### 5 Be creative

Plan engaging activities that include opportunities for virtual collaboration. Perhaps start a lesson with a challenging question, a collaborative online game, or include a virtual scavenger hunt. For younger students, include physical movement, just as you would in a traditional classroom. Be sure to include frequent breaks for students.

# MENTAL HEALTH FOR STUDENTS, CONT.

6

## Be mindful

Reassure students that Distance Learning can also be challenging for teachers. Share your strategies for coping with stress or anxiety that would be appropriate for students. What mindfulness strategies work for you? Perhaps you read for pleasure, take walks, or connect with friends and family.

7

## Take care of yourself

Prioritizing your own physical and mental health will help you be a better teacher. Take time for yourself to rest and reflect so that you can be recharged and available to help your students.

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## HELP WITHIN HCPS:

Collaborate with your school counselor(s). Counselors can provide resources and best practices for helping students cope with anxiety and stress. HCPS counselors have developed activities and resources specifically designed to help students during distance learning.

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## RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

[Maryland School Psychologists' Association](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services  
Mental Health in Adolescents](#)

[Mindfulness Apps for Children](#)

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# MENTAL HEALTH FOR STUDENTS, CONT.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### [www.childmind.org](http://www.childmind.org)

*The Child Mind Institute is a nonprofit organization which offers support to families for children with mental health and learning disorders.*

### [www.edutopia.org](http://www.edutopia.org)

*This foundation shares best practices in education to help students be successful in school and beyond.*

### [www.safeschools.com](http://www.safeschools.com)

*This company offers safety and compliance learning for educators through e-learning.*

### [www.common sense.org/education/](http://www.common sense.org/education/)

*Common Sense is a website dedicated to offering expert reviews, advice, and tools for educators.*

### [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)

*an independent news source for leaders, educators, and policy experts in pre-K through high school.*

**A GOOD TEACHER CAN  
INSPIRE HOPE, IGNITE THE  
IMAGINATION AND INSTILL  
A LOVE OF LEARNING.**

*Brad Henry (politician)*

COMMUNICATION

# COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is essential for building school and family partnerships. Communication will especially be important to help build positive relationships during virtual learning. Aim for your first interaction to be positive.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE EVERYTHING!

When communicating with parents, be clear in what you are saying. Call home when there are concerns, but also be sure to call home when there is good news. If you don't want to do a phone call, consider a good news post card to be mailed to the home?

*Think of contacting parents like a bank. Whenever you call home for a negative reason, it is a withdrawal. Whenever you call home for a positive reason, it is a deposit. We all like our banking accounts to have more deposits than withdrawals!*

Good two-way communication between families and schools is necessary for your students' success. The more parents and teachers share relevant information with each other about a student, the better equipped both will be to help that student achieve academically.

Opportunities for two-way communication include:

- Video message to parents
  - Parent conferences
  - Phone calls
  - Emails
  - *Microsoft Teams* Meetings
  - Newsletters
- 

## HOW TO GET IN—TOUCH WITH PARENTS:

- Create a Microsoft Form survey to send to parents. You can request information like email addresses, phone numbers, and preferred means of contact.
  - Consider using the Remind app. It is an excellent way to keep parents and students informed of announcements or other daily information. Be sure to include this information on your syllabus if you are using Remind.
  - Check the Teacher Access Center (TAC) for contact information
  - Check with the school nurse. Health forms also include relevant contact information.
  - Check with the school secretary. School contact forms also include relevant contact information, and sometimes there are updates in the information.
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# COMMUNICATION, CONT.

## KEEP A PARENT CONTACT LOG

Document Your Parent Contacts! Consider keeping a written or electronic document for parent contacts. Non-technology methods include a manila folder for each student or a binder with student names. Electronic options could include a One Note notebook or on an Excel spreadsheet. The important information to include is:

- Student name
- Date of contact
- Name of person you contacted
- Contact information
- Reason for contact
- Summary of contact

Be sure to also print out/save any email correspondence that is relevant. One idea is to create a subfolder within your email for parent contacts.

Making phone calls home can be challenging, especially when the reason for the call is due to behavior or other concerns. Positive phone calls always seem to go so much easier! To help you out, here are some key points to consider in your conversation using *the Oreo method*:

**One-** Give a general statement of praise. Talk about something positive that the student has done recently.

**Two-** Describe the purpose for your call. Try to describe actions and avoid labeling. Ask questions seeking support.

**Three-** Give another positive remark.

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**ONE CHILD, ONE TEACHER,  
ONE BOOK, ONE PEN  
CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.**

*Malala Yousafzai*

COLLABORATION

# COLLABORATION

## COLLABORATION WITH COLLEAGUES

As a new teacher, it can be challenging to be on a team with people you don't know. In the 2020-2021 school year, you are faced with an unusual situation. You may be on a team with teachers who have history together and who are experienced teachers. There will be much uncertainty with everyone. These 5 ideas may be beneficial to being able to really pull together as a team and collaborate with each other, even virtually.

- 1 Create a truly shared vision and goals**  
The level of ownership they feel in the process influences how much teachers actually invest in collaborative work. A shared vision and goals can lead to that sense of ownership. Ask the question: What is our team's purpose?
- 2 Develop a sense of community**  
At its core, collaboration is relational. Getting to know your colleagues, understanding their passions, and taking the time to connect on a personal level can help members gain mutual respect and look past perceived eccentricities in others. Avoid being a "teacher island". Reach out to the experienced teachers on your team. Ask questions! And take care of each other: offer social and emotional support to each other.
- 3 Identify group norms**  
Identifying and establishing group norms also can help develop that safe environment. Norms might include defining roles and responsibilities, using protocols for interpersonal communication, and outlining parameters for time management. Roles and responsibilities might need to be re-distributed. When and how will we meet? What will we discuss?
- 4 Use Discussion and Dialogue**  
Discussion moves the conversation forward. In discussion, individuals state their opinions for the purpose of building consensus or making decisions. Teams might have to re-establish how they communicate, how resources are shared, how they make decisions and how they report on progress in a virtual world.
- 5 Work Through Conflict**  
It can be helpful for your team to develop a conflict management plan and to monitor conflict as it arises. Teams can help manage conflict by providing time, space, grace, and support for individuals as they work through their emotions. Individuals also should monitor their own emotions and practice self-care. We are all susceptible to higher emotions due to our current situation.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**[Association for Middle Level Education \(AMLE\): Building Teacher Collaboration School-wide](#)**

**[Global Educator Collective](#)**

*A Facebook page for collaboration with teachers all over the world who share their expertise and support other teachers. (You have to request to join.)*

**[www.teachersconnect.com](http://www.teachersconnect.com)**

*Online forum to connect with teachers all over the globe.*



# COLLABORATION, CONT.

## COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS

### Relationships

Build a good relationship between yourself and the parents. Encourage parents to have a growth mindset, this in turn will encourage kids to have a growth mindset. Be empathetic and compassionate for parents who have not trained to be teachers. They are under a lot of pressure too.

### Communication

Teachers need to have consistent, regular communication with parents. You should touch base with them early on in the school year. Make sure to discuss how you will partner together through distance learning.

### Family Input

Beyond their technological capacity, how can you identify what each family has to offer (e.g., interests, skills, strengths) and potential challenges they may face (e.g. internet, supplies, time, etc.) in supporting their child's learning?

### Resources

Provide resources for distance learning success, ie: Tutorials/Cheat Sheets/weekly checklist.

### Virtual Announcements

Self-recorded videos can be embedded in an email or posted on a website, and can include a "joke of the week" or another fun challenge to help support both the mental and emotional health of families. YouTube or Facebook Live can also be a way to reach out to parents. Parents will appreciate the "live" contact!



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The Home School Team: Emphasis on Parent Involvement](#)

[Engaging families in Distance Learning from Afar](#)

[Tips for supporting parents and families during distance learning](#)

[Ways to support parents during distance learning](#)

[Preparing for Distance Learning from a parent perspective](#)

**A GREAT TEACHER CAN  
TEACH CALCULUS WITH  
A PAPER CLIP AND  
LITERATURE IN AN  
EMPTY FIELD.**

**TECHNOLOGY IS JUST  
ANOTHER TOOL, NOT  
A DESTINATION.**

*Unknown*

DIGITAL RESOURCES

# DIGITAL RESOURCES

These digital resources have been curated for you to apply into your instruction. You are encouraged to leverage the use of the essential *itslearning* elements and slowly add in other web tools to maximize your instruction.

[Click here to access HCPS Web Tools](#)

[Click here to access \*itslearning\*](#)

## ESSENTIAL ITSLEARNING ELEMENTS

### Note

Consists of a title and one single rich content editor. The rich text block may contain images, links, audio, video, and embedded content.

### Link

Ability to provide stand-alone content to a lesson. Links support easy navigation to websites, videos, interactives, etc.

### Assignment

Students have the ability to respond to an assignment using the rich content editor (including audio or video) or attaching a file to the assignment.

### Page

Consists of multiple blocks of content information focused on a topic.

### Task

Non-digital submissions that may include work taking place outside of the *itslearning* platform.

### Discussion

Students have the ability to post to a discussion board using the rich content editor (including audio or video).

### Test

Assess mastery with a wide variety of question types.

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## CONTENT REPOSITORIES

### Discovery Ed Streaming

Home to curricular resources, multimedia content and professional development.

### Culture Grams

Up to date cultural content and cultural reference and curriculum products.

### Gale

Vetted content like articles, magazines, newspapers, eBooks videos or podcasts.

### ScholasticGo

Explore nonfiction texts, world newspapers, videos and more with student friendly & easy-to-navigate digital resources.

### Infobase

Secondary curriculum-connected research tool.

### Pebble Go

Elementary curriculum-connected research tool.

### World Book

E-learning resources designed for all ages and abilities.

### TeachingBooks

Collection of digital resources that bring books to life.

# DIGITAL RESOURCES, CONT.

These digital resources have been curated for you to apply into your instruction. You are encouraged to leverage the use of the essential *itslearning* elements and slowly add in other webtools to maximize your instruction.

## WEB BASED TOOLS

### Padlet

A digital multimedia sticky note forum allowing posts of text, files, links, images, and video.

### Flipgrid

A collaborative video discussion or presentation space.

### Thinglink

A platform for creating interactive images.

### ClassFlow

A collaborative lesson delivery for interactive whiteboards and interactive displays.

### Socrative

A formative assessment tool.

### AnswerGarden

A digital "Scribble Space" for real time audience participation, online brainstorming and classroom feedback.

### Mentimeter

A feedback tool that allows the facilitator to engage and interact with the audience in real-time.

### Gizmo

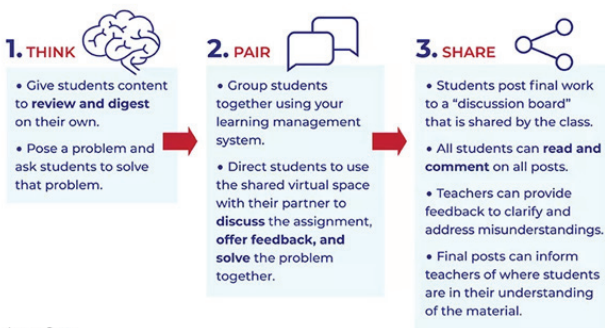
Interactive math and science simulations for grades 3-12.

### Formative

Allows you to create online assessments, classwork and homework assignments.

## How Can We Take Common Teaching Strategies Online?

In hybrid-learning environments or even socially distanced classrooms, teachers will have to find new ways to carry out familiar routines. As an example, here's how a think-pair-share might look in an asynchronous online environment.



Icons: Getty

SOURCE: Association of College and University Educators



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In accordance with the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §1681, et seq.), Harford County Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any of its programs or activities or with regard to employment. Inquiries about the application of Title IX, and its implementing regulations to Harford County Public Schools may be referred to Dr. Paula Stanton, Harford County Public Schools Title IX Coordinator, by mail to 102 S. Hickory Avenue, Bel Air, Maryland 21014, or by telephone to 410-809-6064 or by email to [Paula.Stanton@hcps.org](mailto:Paula.Stanton@hcps.org), or the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights in the United States Department of Education by mail to 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202 or by telephone 1-800-421-3481, or both.