

We Raise NJ is working with our partner organizations to spotlight individual educators, students, parents, and leaders who are showing how #NJStrong they are with their resilient and creative support for students during this challenging time. We do not want to downplay the challenges our educators and students are facing but we feel that highlighting the stories and small successes of a few individuals who are making the best of this situation might be both uplifting and useful to other leaders, educators, and families across the state.



SPOTLIGHT:

ROSEANGELA MENDOZA

*The Ethical Community Charter School
Middle School Lead & Social Studies Teacher
Community Outreach & Service Learning Coordinator
2019 NJ Charter Advocate of the Year*

Creating a sense of community in the classroom with family engagement.

After spending years as a substitute teacher, Ms. Mendoza realized that she was ultimately meant to be a full-time classroom teacher. Now in her sixth year, teaching fully remote, she misses having her students in-person and being in her classroom. Her school is still in the planning process for transitioning to a hybrid model, and when it goes into effect, students will be phased into attending in-person by grade; first Kindergarten and first graders, and so on. Although her students aren't in the school building, she did mention that she occasionally goes into school to teach remotely from her classroom.

“Separating work and home life can be difficult, so I alternate teaching remotely from both. I think it helps create a sense of normalcy for my students and it’s also given me access to materials to help with the engagement of my lessons.”

Although she teaches middle school, and many of her students can complete their work independently, she emphasized the importance of consistent communication with families. When schools closed last spring, she realized that parents and families needed immediate support. Whether it be an email, a phone call, or a text message, she makes sure that there is clarity around how to use technology to meet the academic expectations she has set.

"I've gotten positive reactions from parents and families for keeping them in the loop about their children's education. Establishing regular communication with families has helped me identify who needs resources and additional support. A large number of my students' families thought they would be prepared to learn remotely this year using only cell phones or tablets because that's what they used in the spring. Once we got clarity around the need for hot spots and devices to complete school work in the fall, my school quickly got those materials out to families."

Ms. Mendoza reinforced that her school's mission to exercise ethics and understanding has helped keep her grounded.

"We're not just a school, we're a family. Whatever we do, together or as individuals, should benefit everyone who is in our community. Many of the families in our school are predominantly Spanish-speaking, and as a fluent Spanish speaker, I do my best to translate for families across the school. They have my phone number and can call me whenever they need help. To be honest, even though the device and internet access issue has been solved, many have had difficulty understanding how to use technology to support their children. Regardless, I know I am building strong and lasting relationships for our school community."

Ms. Mendoza has even gone as far as drawing diagrams on blank sheets of paper to help parents and families navigate the unfamiliar digital environment. She emphasized having patience and supporting each other through this unprecedented time to get through it together. Her dedication to creating a healthy environment for students, where teachers and families are partners in learning, has proven to pay off. Kudos to Ms. Mendoza for going above and beyond and illustrating how to be #NJstrong!