

Christian School Faces COVID Challenge With Virtual 'Out of the Box' Student Experience

Orlando's One School of the Arts has found a unique way to bring creative, real-life learning and community to the virtual classroom.

COVID-19 has brought with it many challenges. But out of those challenges have come many creative ideas. This is particularly true for the field of education, where school administrators and teachers have had to tackle everything from socially distanced classrooms to online learning to hybrid (online and classroom) learning and more. One School of the Arts (OSOTA), a private Christian school in Longwood, Florida, has faced this challenge with innovation and developed an amazing way to connect with families that has helped grow the school in a difficult season.

Pastor Ron Johnson of One Church, the school's sponsoring church, says, "When we began to get into this season, and we had to figure out education all over again, that was a huge, huge challenge. We—like many churches that have good Christian schools—have had success. There have been times where it's been challenging. But God has helped us and given us incredible grace in the middle of it. But we were not expecting a COVID-type circumstance to ever hit us.

"And so when this came, we were suddenly confronted with a huge shift in our student population," Johnson says. "We were losing scholars; families were fearful, as church leaders and school leaders across the country are experiencing. And so in the middle of that we were confronted with a huge problem:

Would we just simply try to do school as normal? Or were we going to take a step in another direction?

“And I do believe this, that innovation oftentimes comes out of big problems,” Johnson says. “I think that we as Christians sometimes spend our lives trying to avoid problems, when God—if we are really listening to Him—can use the problem to become a seedbed for enormous productivity and innovation.”

Head of School Kristen Campbell explains how One School of the Arts rose to meet the challenge. The school focuses on 21st-century learning, she says, preparing young people for success. Over the years, many people had asked about an online program, but since culture is such an important part of OSOTA, administrators didn’t see how a virtual avenue would work.

“We believe that culture either happens by default or design, and we’ve been incredibly intentional with the design of our school,” she says. But “God just downloaded this. We were in prayer. And it was one of those moments where ... it just was literally pouring through,” she says.

The county placed a cap on OSOTA’s admissions years ago, Campbell says, and in the past, the school has had to turn away hundreds of students who requested admission. “But thanks to COVID, God showed us how to move past these limits,” she says.

Campbell says she wrote everything down as fast as God shared it, “And He showed us, ‘This is how you take the culture that I’ve given you on this campus, and you share it, because we’re called to equip more than those who just can fit on our campus,’” she says. The school devised a program called “OSOTA Online & Out of the Box,” a combination of live virtual instruction with in-class scholars and teachers and a curated “out of the box” experience with the five C’s of culture that the school sends out each month to provide scholars with the true OSOTA expression.

“Every single month, we have a different box that shows up,” Campbell says. “You know whether it’s in Colorado, New York City or down in Miami, these boxes come, and each one is curated very specifically, whether it’s a second-grade experience, a sixth grader’s experience or senior’s experience. And that’s our Online & Out of the Box program.” She says parents and scholars have responded positively, posting about their scholars’ new boxes on social media—so much so that the school’s enrollment continues to grow.

The monthly boxes contain manipulatives that help scholars incorporate the creative aspects of learning as well as supplies to help them share in school competitions, grow in character, deepen their faith and engage in meaningful connections from the comfort of their homes via Zoom. “We also do room remixes in our campus ... an incredible immersive experience that happens within all levels of our classrooms,” OSOTA Principal Bill Seidel says. “Just today, our second graders were surgeons, but they weren’t surgeons in a medical sense. But we bring all the medical supplies and experience; we call them doctors, but they are carving up sentences, working on contractions and surgically breaking apart sentences and rebuilding them. They work with positioning different elements of the human body and organs and positioning them within a kind of a skeleton structure. And they work out math problems by breaking apart the long form and bringing them into different ways in which they can work out the problem.

“But kids are dressed in hair nets and masks and scrubs,” Seidel says. “And they feel like doctors; we set the atmosphere to be doctors for the day. And an Out of the Box experience allows kids to do that at home as well.”

To learn more about how OSOTA is facing the challenges of education during a pandemic by using the creativity God gives each one of us, [click here](#) to listen to this episode of *The Strang Report* podcast. And be sure to like and share the

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