

Closegap Acts as Mental Health Lifeline Between Students and Educators During Coronavirus Pandemic

In March 2020 Constance Certion and Erin Williams wished their middle and high school students a good spring break and promised to see them when they all came back the following week. Within a few days, however, it became clear they were not going to be coming back. The coronavirus pandemic quickly swept across the United States shutting down all in-person learning and thrusting educators and students into the online learning space.

In their role as social and transitional specialists, Ms. Certion and Ms. Williams were immediately in need of a way to stay connected with the mental, social, and emotional needs of their students in the Arlington school district outside of Memphis, Tennessee. “We wanted to have a way to check-in with all students,” Ms. Certion shared. “To let us know how they’re doing and to have a way to communicate with us.”

“We wanted to have a way to check-in with all students... To let us know how they’re doing and to have a way to communicate with us.”

Impressed with Closegap both as a parent and school staff member, Ms. Certion quickly shared her discovery of the platform with Ms. Williams. Both were immediately drawn to the proactive and organized approach to responding to student’s needs and quickly got the school district on board.

Students log-in to their Closegap account each morning and take 2-3 minutes to respond to a series of emotional wellness questions. Younger students are guided through their check-in by Cadet, the platform’s spacesuit-wearing mascot who introduces users to a solar system of planets each representing different moods. A bright red planet with a furrowed brow and gritted teeth represents feeling angry, for example, while a plump and content looking orange planet identifies a student is feeling good. Cadet also asks students to share their energy level, or how much fuel is in their spaceship. Teens, on the other hand, swap out the cartoon mascot for a sleek and minimalist interface with abstract and multicolored planets.

Closegap gives educators a summary of every student’s check-in information, including their mood, energy level, and unmet needs when they log into their dashboard. The platform organizes students by the severity of their needs and allows staff to indicate when they have followed up with a student so their colleagues can see which students still need attention.

Ms. Certion remembers how “within an hour of sharing Closegap with teachers I had five or six emails saying, ‘Oh my goodness this is so needed. Thank you so much.’ And from there, they were already referring kids they felt needed some extra support.” Prior to implementing Closegap, “sometimes we wouldn’t know if someone is having a bad day or is struggling” Ms. Williams added.

Ms. Certion shared how she especially appreciates how Closegap teaches students coping skills in response to their daily check-in. “I love that,” she shared. “I love how Closegap teaches coping skills right there during their check-in and they can learn how to utilize those skills.”

Closegap has significantly reduced pressure on already hard-working teachers to act as a liaison between the students in their classroom and additional services at the school. Implementing Closegap for Arlington students during the coronavirus pandemic offered a lifeline of connection between students and educators during a time of unprecedented separation and uncertainty. Many students were even doing the check-ins over the weekend. The student responses to Closegap clearly indicated to Ms. Certion that the platform was meeting an unmet need and the schools in the Arlington school district plan to continue using Closegap even after the pandemic ends.

“I love how Closegap teaches coping skills right there during their check-in and they can learn how to utilize those skills.”