

The BHS Innovation Fund's summer grant promotes wellness in remote learning model

[Anya Rao](#), Staff Writer | January 14, 2021



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The BHS Innovation Fund's COVID-19 Teaching and Learning Response grant is responsible for the positive aspects of remote learning in the school environment.

As a chorus of students' "thank you's" come through the speakers of teachers' computers after a long day on Zoom, they are reminded of the incredible work and time they put in to teach remotely.

Although educators have faced challenges during remote learning, the [BHS Innovation Fund's](#) COVID-19 Teaching and Learning Response grant has provided faculty and students with an array of resources and opportunities for a more positive experience.

The Innovation Fund is a group of volunteers who raise money and review teacher proposals to possibly fund. According to Ellen Rizika,

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Funded by the COVID-19 Teaching and Learning Response Grant

the chair of the Innovation Fund's board, the fund is to provide teachers time out of their schedules to pursue interests and ideas and develop innovative solutions to problems.

The Innovation Fund has been working for several years to enhance the experience of students at the high school. Head of School Anthony Meyer said the Innovation Fund collaborates effectively with faculty.

"One of the things I love about the Innovation Fund is they very much want to listen to and support teachers. I think we'd all agree: (teachers) know the profession and their practice best," Meyer said.

After the remote learning experience in the spring, the faculty was determined to make changes and better the experience of both students and teachers.

Meyer said that the high school struggled institutionally during the spring due to town and state laws, as well as a lack of preparation.

Going into the summer, teachers needed time to develop a more effective system and format for remote learning. They proposed a grant to the Innovation Fund, hoping for time to compile ideas and resources to work towards better virtually simulating an in-person classroom experience.

Astrid Allen, Spanish teacher and Program Liaison of the Innovation Fund, recognized the difficulties of developing a classroom community through remote learning.

"We were really worried about connections and building community because it was so hard to build community in the spring. I think it was really hard for people because they didn't have the structures in place to have a uniform experience," Allen said.

Over the summer, the fund paid a group of teachers to gather information about effective remote learning practices. They developed the BHS Remote Learning Toolbox, a set of platforms and strategies for teaching remotely. Some of these include resources such as Pear Deck or Padlet, which many teachers have been trying out this semester. The toolbox is the main product of the grant, as much of the time granted to teachers was spent creating the resource and familiarizing staff with it.

Allen said the grant affected the collaboration across different departments.

"We're really great collaborators at BHS, but we don't always collaborate with each other across departments," Allen said. "A really amazing thing the grant afforded us to do was collaborate across departments and have a unified vision of what was important in remote school and work together as a whole school to get there."

Members of the Innovation Fund eased the faculty's uncertainty and lack of experience with many online platforms. The grant also delved deeper into major issues from the spring, such as students' isolation.

Jennee Uttaro, Dean of the Old Lincoln School (OLS), said that remote learning poses challenges for building classroom communities.

"How do you build a class community, especially with a group of students you may have never met before and who may not have met each other?" Uttaro said.

Through many teacher-run workshops as well as the Toolbox, many faculty found platforms to better connect with students and began to devote more time to fostering their relationships.

In terms of addressing content gaps, members of the summer grant group began their focus on the 9th grade, where each student had a very different experience last year, as students were coming from eight different K-8 schools. According to Uttaro, it was unclear how much of their usual curriculum was taught remotely and how that differed across schools.

As the team began thinking about content gaps, they decided this issue was pertinent to the rest of the school since many students had a variety of gaps from their learning in the spring. Allen said that the members of the fund made content adjustments in a very methodical manner.

"The team was very serious and deliberate about what stays and what goes, as far as curriculum goes and what's essential, what kids need, and what kids need in this environment," Allen said.

Meyer said the grant is responsible for much of the high quality remote learning this past fall.

"Our goal as an institution is to have high quality learning, so in my mind, it's helping teachers teach kids well and support them," Meyer said. "Every kid has experienced that in some way this fall from the summer grant."

According to Uttaro, one of the biggest successes of the grant was its ability to provide hope to teachers and staff.

"The grant was successful in an intangible way. It built up morale and hope, and it was informative in a concrete way," Uttaro said.