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Remote learning nearly perfect situation for her



Amazing Teacher Vicki Fritz works with her remote learning fifth-grade students at Tomoka Elementary School in Ormond Beach.

PHOTOS BY DAVID TUCKER/NEWS-JOURNAL

May's Amazing Teacher keeps gifted students on track this year

By Cassidy Alexander
Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Amazing Teachers: About this series

» As part of an effort to honor the work of teachers in Volusia and Flagler counties, The News-Journal and All Aboard Storage are sharing stories of educators who have made an impact on students' lives with a different story each month.

» Go to news-journalonline.com to see more stories about inspiring teachers in Volusia and Flagler counties.

» To nominate a teacher, visit news-journalonline.com/contests.

every day," said the teacher with 12 years of experience and a master's degree in instructional technology. It hasn't been easy, but Fritz was well-suited to the task. And in the last week of school, she's sad to see it coming to an end.

For her commitment to making remote learning a positive experience for her students, Fritz is The News-Journal's Amazing Teacher for the month of May.

Even though Volusia Live won't be offered in Volusia County next year, and the option has been criticized by parents and district leaders alike, and thousands of students who started learning remotely in the beginning of the year transitioned back to traditional schooling — Fritz said it's working for her class.

In the beginning there were certainly challenges. She started the year with more than 30 students all trying to navigate the new learning mode, which was a struggle. Many of them were going through stressful times at home, with relatives who's health put them at risk. It

made her rethink how she teaches. "This year could not just be about academic standards," she said.

When she got stressed, so did her students. She began to focus on teaching them to be empathetic for each other.

And in turn, the academics came through. Students were still able to participate in the school's science fair, and they're learning about architecture through computer programs instead of with paper and scissors.

Assessments show that almost all of her students have achieved maximum growth, which her classes don't even achieve sometimes in a normal year.

"She just really impressed me that she was able to get through all of this," said Erin Glover-Frey, a parent whose daughter is in Fritz's class this year.

The family, including fifth-grader Tess, was apprehensive about remote learning. She's technically enrolled at Pine Trail Elementary but learning from a teacher at a

totally different school. Now, she wouldn't have it any other way.

"She's a really good teacher," Tess said. "She encourages all of us and makes really fun projects. She changes what we would be doing in person a little bit so it's more accessible (online)."

Fritz knows the success her students have experienced would not have been possible for every student in the district: For young students, or those who are home alone, or those who aren't self-motivated, it's hard to replace a classroom setting. But with the gifted students who are predisposed to pick up new material quickly, the virtual setting works.

"Are you ready?" Fritz asked her students, who grinned back at her from the Teams meeting. "Beam me up, Scotty!"

They all waved and squealed and seemed to disappear — although of course, they were just being routed to a new virtual room to have small group discussions about their reading.

"They all love this part because

they don't know who they're going to see," Fritz explained as she hopped from room to room herself to make sure everyone was on task. It's one of the dozens of small ways that made the year unique — and tolerable.

There's also the way pets can make an appearance during snack break, or how someone stays in the main video chat for an extra minute to explain she was slow to answer a question because she had to put the clothes in the dryer for her mom.

"I've never bonded with a group of kids like this," Fritz said, "because you're constantly with them in their houses."

So even though this week marks the end of an undoubtedly difficult school year, Fritz will remember it fondly and plans to incorporate much of it into her in-person lessons.

"If I never have to use paper again, I won't," she said.



Amazing teacher Vicki Fritz works with her remote learning fifth grade students, Thursday May 20, 2021 at Tomoka Elementary School in Ormond Beach. DAVID TUCKER/NEWS JOURNAL



Fritz gives her students a thumbs up as they complete an assignment on Thursday.

Vicki Fritz's head is just visible over the top of her computer monitor in the back of the room. The portable at Tomoka Elementary school classroom is ...empty?

Upon closer inspection, an entire class of fifth graders is on Fritz's computer screen — 13 squares that show a glimpse of a student's home. Their voices filter in through a speaker under the window, turned up to give the illusion that they're right there with her.

Fritz is teaching fifth grade gifted students from around the district who would otherwise not be able to participate in the advanced program from home. It's a regional Volusia Live class — and she loves it.

"I would love to do this forever,