Whittier COVID addendum

Find out how the team at Whittier Elementary school has adapted their instructional model as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while still taking a Next Education Workforce approach to working as a team and supporting their students.

Time operating in a Next Education Workforce model prior to COVID-19: N/A — Model adopted during the pandemic

Path through COVID:
- **August 2020 – September 2020:** Remote
- **September 2020 – present (December 2020):** Students opt in to remote or modified in-person (first two days a week, then ultimately five days a week), pivoting to all-remote when necessary for the safety of students and staff

Educator team: Six content area teachers, two of whom serve as lead teachers for the team, and one special educator working with four MLFTC residents

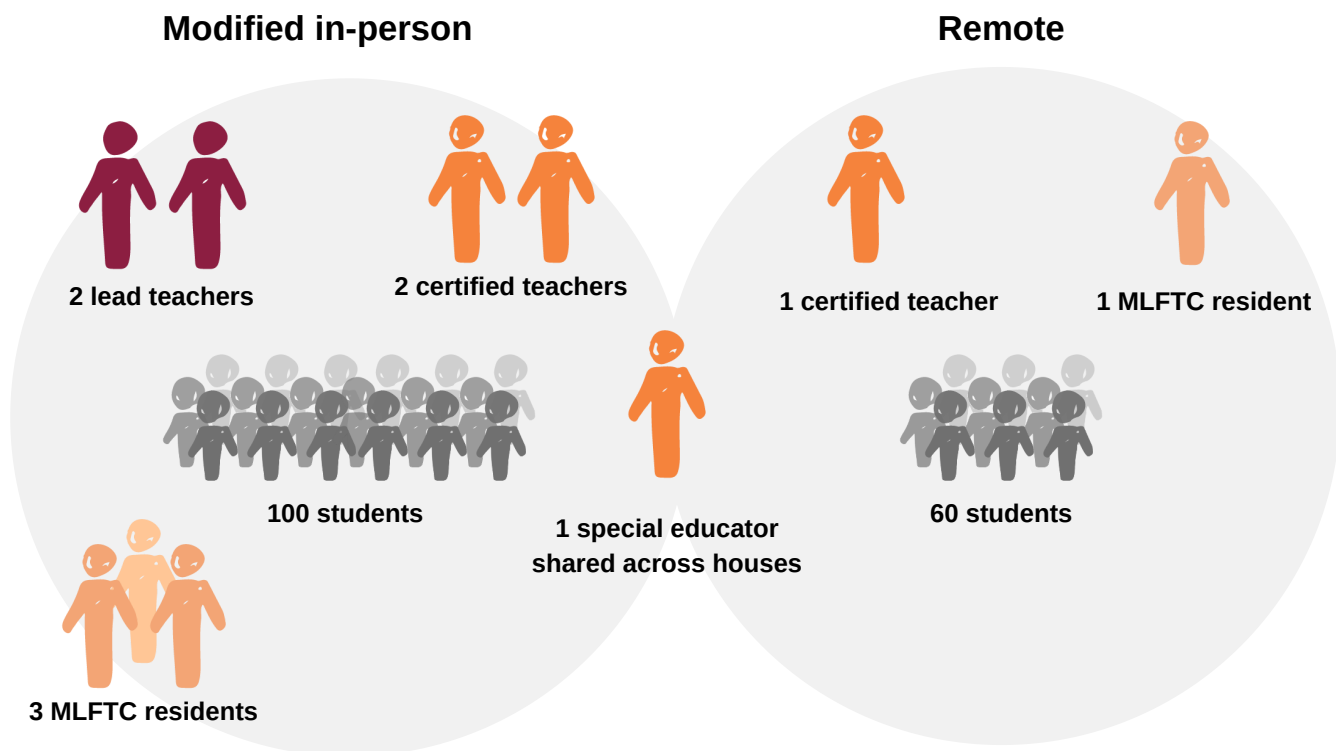**Students:** 160 4th, 5th and 6th graders

▶ Redeploying the team to support both remote and in-person learning

Prior to COVID, Whittier planned to launch their new model with two multigrade houses of approximately 85 students each to support a total of about 170 students. Educators would be divided evenly between the two houses, and while they would all co-plan together, they would engage only with the 85 students in their house.

For the 2020–21 school year, approximately 100 students selected in-person learning, while approximately 60 students selected remote learning. To better support the groups of different sizes and to ensure both groups had as seamless an experience as possible, the educator team decided to operate as a single house, redeploying educators based on student numbers in each of the two instructional contexts (i.e., modified in-person or remote).

At present, both lead teachers, two certified teachers and three of the four MLFTC residents are supporting approximately 100 students who attend class in-person, while one certified teacher and one MLFTC resident are supporting approximately 60 students who attend class remotely. The special educator works across both groups of students.

The full team still follows the same scope and sequence and works together to plan lessons and learning experiences, with educators across both contexts adapting the plans to best meet the needs of their students. This has proved to be important to students' sense of continuity on the few occasions when circumstances have required students to switch instructional contexts (e.g., from in-person to remote).

Modified in-person　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Remote**

2 lead teachers　　　**2 certified teachers**　　　**1 certified teacher**　　　**1 MLFTC resident**

100 students　　　**1 special educator shared across houses**　　　**60 students**

3 MLFTC residents

▶ Prioritizing student-educator relationships

Whittier educators wanted to ensure students developed strong relationships with at least one educator during this challenging time. With this in mind, educators asked each student which educator(s) they would approach if they needed help or advice. Students' responses guided the creation of multi-age homeroom structures within the house. Students meet briefly in homerooms (either in-person or virtually) four days per week, and for a longer period on Wednesdays. Wednesday's homeroom, which lasts 90 minutes, focuses on building strong relationships: teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships and relationships between students and their own learning progress.

▶ Identifying just-right responsibilities for MLFTC residents

In defining and planning for the evolution of educator roles in the context of COVID, the Whittier team took into account both residents' need for support and the expertise they bring with respect to tools for digital learning. MLFTC residents are senior-year students engaged in 15 weeks of clinical experience. As preservice teachers, they benefit from having intentionally sheltered roles commensurate with their skill. With this need in mind, the team built their schedule to allow for each resident to work closely with a different partner teacher each month, incrementally building their understanding of pedagogical content knowledge. But while residents may be novices in some respects, they have brought expertise in other, much-needed areas. Specifically, the residents came to the team with deep experience in technology, including use of the cameras, streaming platforms, learning software and other digital tools that have been central to effective instruction for remote learners. The team recognized their expertise and capitalized on it, inviting the residents to be leaders in remote learning technologies even as they were building their pedagogical knowledge and skills.