Lisha is a UTeach Dallas graduate, Biology teacher and Team lead, current UTeach Dallas mentor teacher and presented at the UTeach Conference in 2020. Lisha was asked if she would share some thoughts and ideas for starting school during this very unique time for all educators:

“What does the first day of school look like when you can’t see your kids? I am pretty sure that was one of the top questions that floated through most teachers’ minds this summer as we anxiously awaited the plans from our respective districts in response to this pandemic we are facing.

How do I know that I am going to forge a bond with “My Kids” even if I never see them in person? I know because as a UTeach Dallas graduate building rapport is my number one goal. The idea of relationships before content is so important.

After the experience with the spring emergency at-home learning, I can suggest a few things that my students absolutely loved when I asked for feedback.

- **Weekly check-ins** - It was something completely NOT content related. It had random multiple-choice questions or voting for things like “Is a hotdog considered a sandwich?” This gave us a chance to check in on their mental status as well.

- **Putting photos of you/your team into assignments.** We started taking photos of ourselves as part of the scenarios we were giving to students to problem solve. It might not work for every activity, but it was a fun way to stay engaged, and the students’ responses were really amusing sometimes.

- **Personalized feedback.** For each of the weekly check-ins I would give feedback or comment on their submissions. This lets them know that you have not only read it, but that you have processed what they are saying, and it gives you a chance to relate to them.

- **Give students your point of view as well.** I let them know how much I wanted to be back with them and that I missed them.

Overall, we know that a student must believe and trust that there is a person behind the screen that they will be engaging with. I firmly believe that students are engaged online in your class as much as you are engaged in them. Reach out, don’t hide how this experience affects you, and be real. Your students will do the same.”

Lisha Haughton
Pre-AP Biology Team Lead
Lowery Freshman Center
Allen ISD
My experience as a new teacher: Navigating my first year of teaching is just as hard as most people said it would be. However, it’s not so frightening when I have a very supportive group of teachers, whether at school or UTeach Dallas alumni, who are willing to collaborate and share ideas in the best interest of our students. Some of my favorite moments are when students let themselves be vulnerable during SEL activities and open up to me about how stressed, happy, or confused they are—I get to connect with them and understand their needs better.

Priscilla Okanlawon
Chemistry
Samuell Early College High School
Dallas ISD
Spring 2020 Graduate

CONGRATULATIONS!
Helen Arceneaux
Science Teacher • Liberty Junior High • Richardson ISD
Region X 2020 Secondary Teacher of the Year
Semi-finalist for 2020 Texas Teacher of the Year
RISD Teacher of the Year
RISD STARS Award
Texas Instrument Innovations in STEM Teaching Award

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