Nicole: Hi, thank you for joining us!

Gianna: How are you guys?

Will: Doing well how about yourself?

Gianna: Of course! Good thank you!

Nicole: To start this off Will and I just want to let you know what we are doing for our project, and I know you probably already read already in our interview. What we are hoping to do is build a website for teachers to use to learn how to create online content

Gianna: Awesome

Nicole: We're trying to conduct interviews with people who have experience in virtual learning, whether it be like in your case additional help for students taking virtual classes or in other cases where people are actually doing synchronous learning online. So we were looking to interview you about your experience with this, but we would like to ask you a few questions. We wanted to ask you directly if we had your permission to record this interview?

Gianna: Yes

Nicole: Along with this any of the information that you do share with us can be confidential as in we wouldn't use your name or location, obviously we won't be using location or anything like that, but if we would like to quote you in our report if we can use your name?

Gianna: That's okay you can.

Nicole: Sorry

Gianna: I used to this for school to yeah you're fine.

Nicole: But you also obviously have the option to remain confidential and anonymous

Gianna: Okay

Nicole: Along with this full disclosure if there is a question that you would like to not answer just let us know will move on, and if you do not understand a question we can also easily rephrase it. Following this, once our report is more readily available or once we finished building our website would you like us to send over any of that information?

Gianna: Sure

Nicole: And following this interview would you like to see the transcript we make after it, it's just going to be a direct transcript?

Gianna: Sure

Nicole: Alright So what is your level experience with education in general? how long have you been teaching and do you have any certifications?

Gianna: Yeah, so I have been teaching for 5 years now and I am going into my sixth. I am certified in elementary education as well as special education. I graduated from Rhode Island College in 2015 with both of those degrees, and from there I got a job in Woonsocket at a private school doing behavioral Middle School. So something I was not certified in because I was elementary. And that was very difficult, they had no curriculum, and they had no teaching assistants. And you would have to do restraints and it was a lot. And then I left there thinking I was going to quit teaching all together because it was really difficult. And then I taught a summer program with first graders and they were the cutest things ever so I decided to stick with it. And then from there I did 2 years special education in Woonsocket Public Schools. Before my last two years I stumbled upon a job doing high school math in Providence and that would be at this virtual school.

Will: So at this current Virtual School are they currently running online classes, where I believe at least an email as you said it would start very soon?

Gianna: So tomorrow the teachers go back. Our the 9th grade, IEP kids, final four, and English language learners start on the 14th and they'll be full-time in school. And well the back up for a second my school is a charter school, Public charter, so we are accepting students from every single City and town in Rhode Island. So with that being said right now, because of covid Every District approved to go back except Providence and Central Falls, most of our students come from Providence and Central Falls. That's why our new updated plan is that next Monday, 9th grade and special population will come back. On the 28th of September 10th grade will come back and until then. Everyone has to start on the 14th, but they're to do distance learning until they physically return. A week later 11th grade will come back, and then on October 14th is when Gina Raimondo mandated that everyone be back and that's when our seniors will come back as well and we will do half set ups. They have extended the teacher's day by 2 hours And we will be teaching a morning session and an afternoon session so that we can distance learn. We are in downtown Providence and like everyone is in a cubicle on top of one another,

Nicole: Sol going off of this so you are mainly a virtual style teacher or do you also do in class work as well?

Gianna: I do in class. So it's a very interesting set up, I really do like our school, it is unique, I know it's more for your later questions on like if it works for people. 60% of school is done virtually 40% of the school is done in person. The students are to report from 8:45 to 3:15 every day-5 days a week pre-Covid. What they do is they get all their foreign language requirements, their Science, their social studies, I mean like their Tech courses or any little course they need to graduate, they do that independently on the computer. So we use a program called Edgenuity, and it has all the courses there and students can even pick their courses based on language, or their preference for an elective, or what have you and that is what they are to do independently. Math and reading are done kind of as a collaboration. So for me I teach math, I require the students to watch the video of the lesson, there's a Virtual teacher on the computer, they have to watch the video before, be at the video during class. During class a lot of them, being from inner-city schools, have not learned proper note taking. So my first year I found out Just asking them to take notes didn't do anything. Well the first semester rather. So the second semester, I started playing the videos in class and we would take notes together, like on a document camera, and then go over additional problems as needed. But they were at least to get to that point, that's kind of like their homework, because if they're not at that lesson by the time of class they're not allowed to skip anything they have not done to be on that lesson, so I need them to be with us. So yes, they can get that material if they're out sick or if they're on vacation or what have you. They are required to keep up with the material and the percentage goes up by 3%, goes up everyday by 3%, so if you fall behind 3% your computer turns red for that subject. No one wants a red screen because then they're behind. So they are required to do it independently but for math and reading we also work with them in 9th grade.

Nicole: Are you specifically math for 9th grade or you also for other levels?

Gianna: At this school?

Nicole: Uh yes, at like the current moment.

Gianna: So at this school I am a 9th grade math teacher but like I said, I am certified in elementary and special ed so I am not certified to teach high school math. When I went to this job interview actually be quite honest I don't know how I actually got there, I thought I was interviewing for an elementary school and then they started talking about high school and I got very nervous all of a sudden. I am not sure why I was there. So I was honest with them and they created a math position for me where I would be the interventionist, With my special ed background I was supposed to be helping students who struggled in math to fill the gaps in their learning, to be able to keep up with the teacher and the rigor of the class. However, On day 3 of my first-year the math teacher quit and I became the math teacher instead of what I was hired to do. My second year they didn't have a math teacher and then this year they told me I would finally be the interventionist, but our math teacher quit last week. So school starts tomorrow and I still don't know what I'm doing. But either way it is 9th grade math.

Nicole: So I was looking at- it is Village Green virtual right?

Gianna: Yes

Nicole: I was looking at your website and I was reading about how it was kind of a blended style of learning, and it seems as though, I was reading it as if, teachers kind of work to fill in the gaps on what the kids don't learn virtually can you kind of expand upon that a little bit?

Gianna: Like I said with math and English it's very Blended in the sense that you're both online and in person. However, we fill in the gaps through NRF blocks as in non Roto Flex courses, and that is basically their electives or their languages or whatever. So we might have and hour or so for them to work on those courses with a teacher where we can help them because those courses don't have a teacher that meets with you physically. A lot of the students love to just play the video, like I can hit play on the video and be on the other side of the classroom hanging out with their friends and so you're not watching the lesson, you're not taking notes, you're not getting anything from it. So having more of those courses or even just having a babysitter to like sit next to them and say nope turn around sit down you need to watch it. It's a really hard concept for kids to do Independent Learning in 9th grade. We offer a lot of programs at our school including dual enrollment and 3 year graduation. I prefer- Everyone wants to come to our school because they can graduate in 3 years, like what kid doesn't want to say oh I graduated high school in 3 years. However I prefer the dual enrollment program, especially if you want to go to college, because a lot of kids want to graduate in 3 years start college and be able to provide for their families, being lower income. However if you do the dual enrollment program In your senior year your half at VGV and half at CRI. So VGV pays for your CRI courses, so it's better if you plan to go to college because they are going to help you financially and your VGV teachers will still help you with your CRI courses. So it does give you a little bit of a head start and we like when students do that and still keep their grades high Is it helps them to establish their GPA going in. What we found at the three-year grads is a lot of the kids who are graduating in three years and are going to college aren't as prepared whether it's going into the independent study or its keeping up with the work thinking oh it's easy it's just like the Edgenuity program at VGV. And we know college is not like that so we are seeing a big difference with that but those are programs that they offer.

William: Can I ask, just for clarification, I'm assuming CRI is College of Rhode Island I'm assuming at least

Gianna: I am sorry are you guys not from Rhode Island?

Nicole: I am from Rhode Island but he is from Tennessee

Will: I am not, she is, I am from Tennessee

Gianna: Oh I'm sorry, CCRI is the Community College of Rhode Island

Will: Okay, What is VGV?

Gianna: Village Green Virtual

Will: Oh, okay I'm sorry, your school. Nevermind, sorry acronyms

Gianna: Yeah they both have abbreviations

Will: Okay that makes sense

Nicole: So you basically work with these kids and they have their videos and you also showed them how to take notes and do example problems on the side and kind of fill in the gaps that they're not learning. But how do you Kind of help your students navigate the content online given that 60% of it is asynchronous or virtual. The kind of just sitting down with them and make sure they watched videos or that really even a part of it

Gianna: I'm sorry could you just repeat that one more time

Nicole: How do you kind of help your students navigate the curriculum that is given to them online because you said that it is kind of hard for these kids to do this asynchronous learning.

Gianna: So definitely sitting with them in person or helping them get started. Some of the kids just get so overwhelmed and behind when they are in red. For example we had two math courses on their dashboard that last year, from my standpoint we had our regular math course, another course called math lab and that was basically just any gaps that the students would have. Obviously, coming into ninth grade, we expect and want to teach them ninth grade curriculum. When we give them a pre test at the beginning of the year, we find that they can start sometimes as low as sixth grade and so not trying to waste their high school years playing catch up, um, they created a math lab course last year, and that was basically all the lessons from sixth grade to ninth grade that where they showed gaps on their pretest. So each person had their own math lab question, no two were the same and they were all based on like, say, maybe Nicole, you got number two on the pretest. So you have a lesson on whatever that subject was. But William, you got number four wrong, So you would start that lesson, or what have you, they would be different like that. A lot of the students come in hating math And it's overwhelming, especially if you're in ninth grade at a sixth grade level, like you're obviously going to feel defeated, and probably haven't had good success in the past. So these kids were upset that they had two math classes, and some of them wouldn't do it. Some of them were like, no thanks to the first math class, nevermind the math lab course, so definitely getting them to work on that and be less overwhelmed was huge. And with my elementary school background, I made like math lab mountain, and it was literally a mountain on a piece of paper, nd I took a picture of all of their faces and like printed and cut them out and put like Velcro on the board and like, the mountain was sectioned off by percentages. So every time they went up in their math lab course they would move up the mountain towards completion and having accomplished And like that visual for them was really good. Some of them completed, and some were like, no, I still hate math. And then I, then when COVID started that became like a real, a bigger issue, um, and we worked with them on that, but just being the motivation or finding different things, whether it's bribing or like providing like incentives or whatever, like every now and then I would

just be like, okay, whoever has the most growth today, we'll get like a prize at the end of the day, or I'll take you out for lunch tomorrow or what have you. And so all of a sudden, they would spend the whole day doing math lab, and just so I can see that growth and things like that. I mean, their high school, but food really works. Yeah, they love it.

Will: So I'm curious to know though that in the situations in which, so if, they're in these previous- for example, you mentioned example of, of, if there's a ninth grader at a sixth grade math level being brought up towards it. I'm wanting to know, what or if any common sort of online resources that you'd either like encourage them to use or that they might use on their own in order to try to then approach up to then reach that level

Gianna: No, that's a really good question. Unfortunately we don't, especially now because they created this math lab program, because that's kind of what does that for them. And one of our, one of the admins at our school is an engineer and he spends like, weeks and weeks at the beginning of the school year creating this program and this course for each student individually to fill that those gaps. As an entire school, I know they recommend, I don't know if you're familiar with like Khan Academy, but they recommend that for juniors and seniors especially, because it's like really good with their SAT prep. So they do that, or kids looking to do the three year graduation because they have to get so high on their fit and meet certain requirements, and originally, everyone was just able to graduate in three years and now they're like, well, you're not ready. So with more with more years, like our schools only been open for seven years. Well, yeah, seven years. So they're figuring it out each year, but mostly just math lab for the ninth and 10th and then Khan Academy for 11th and 12th.

Nicole: I'm assuming after discussing all of this, the majority of your communication with your students is more or less synchronous and in person rather than any

Gianna: Yeah, I'm in person our schools really unique in the way that come December about, we like to like build a connection and a rapport obviously face to face, and get that level of respect with each other. Then December, my first year was February my last year was December we give them our numbers, our personal cell phone numbers. I might even do it earlier this year. A lot of the students will work from home. Like they come to school during the day but then some of them will do tests and quizzes or whatever at night when they're at home they can have the time and really focus on it. And so sometimes they'll email us and the email server that we use isn't great, so sometimes I don't get my emails for like four hours. And by that point the kids not doing their tasks anymore so I just have them text me. The school allows that we text the parents. So text calls, FaceTime, in person. Now after COVID we use Google meet a lot of communication any any which way as long as we can communicate with them. We don't care how we get in touch with them.

Will: What, just off the top of your head, could you think of any sort of resources, which if you had access to, would help you sort of help the students sort of in like the with the current situations, like, given the current reopening plan, and sort of how it's operating. Could you think of any resources that would be very beneficial for you?

Gianna: I'll kind of like speak to it just more like a whole of the teacher, um, I benefit a lot from teacher pay teachers, which is, do you know what that is?

Will: I've heard of it. This website where they have lesson plans, right? And they just-

Gianna: Yu can make a free account, they can have lesson plans, they can have like science labs, they could have worksheets, or quizzes or just like key words to make a vocab wall or an attendance sheet or like calendars or whatever. Basically, whatever. I teach you possibly mean, they have it on there. It's, it's great, it's free to make an account. Some of the resources are free and some are teachers who pay other teachers for their materials. So like most people I know like myself, we go on and we like filter free, and then we just look for whatever it is that we need. What they literally have everything. Obviously like, the more extensive it probably comes with a cost. But it's really worth it sometimes their whole lesson plan sometimes their units. Sometimes it's just a worksheet like what have you. I think that's really beneficial because a lot of times as teachers we like trying to reinvent the wheel and we have a million things going on during the day. So like in college. I feel like you don't learn much about teaching in college but more like while you're in the field. But one thing you do learn is like not to remake something if someone's already done it. Just like get there. So Teachers Pay Teachers this great. Khan Academy for math, like I said is great, that's k h a n. There's IXL, which is another great math program. Let's say there was another one I was just think, yeah, it will probably come to me. But yeah, things like that are very helpful, even Pinterest, lots of great ideas, whether it's just to like make a chart to hang in the room or, or what have you, or whether it's like, how to help with like behavior or expectations, like getting those things started even though it's high school. Getting those expectations started like right at the beginning will make or break you for the rest of the year.

Nicole: So with the covid 19 pandemic, And like schools and honestly, just every state shutting down, how did you guys have to adapt on your kind of in person learning when that happens.

Gianna: I have a ton of teacher friends and family members, and they are going crazy. And it was so incredibly smooth for us like I was so lucky. Because this is what we do like our program is online. We obviously like went on and like held Google meets and met with the kids and we're in constant communication every day still taking attendance because we started we can see if they like login or not for the school day, and what they're working on and I'll tell us what they worked on how long they spent on it. So like if a kid wants to submit a test and they've like spent one minute and nine seconds. I'm like no, you're there's no way So we can track all that on our end in school or at home, and then meeting them in a Google meet for additional support. But all of their lessons and everything, like usual was there. If we had any additional work being met math or English, would let them know. I personally didn't, because they already have two math courses with me their regular course whether it's pre algebra or algebra, and then their math lab course. But like for the English teacher, she would have them like read a book and answer questions separately. So just constant checking in and using the Edgenuity program that was already in place, because it's the same as our day to day basically, except we're not meeting at village green where they're in their house still. But even that was tricky for some people because like I said, we have In our city like low demographics, below the poverty line, everyone at our school every single person gets free or reduced lunch. And a lot of our students, so the upperclassmen to COVID as a time to work their part time jobs full time. So whether they were at McDonald's or Taco Bell or Dunkin, whatever they do for work, they were there during the day. And then at night, they would do their classwork. Because like I said, it's 24 7 365 so they could do it at night. And as long as we checked within the 24 hours that they logged on, we would mark them as here for the day. Some of our other students say the ninth graders are the

oldest sibling of four or seven or whatever, and they we send our kids home with a computer. Every single one of our kids were sent home with a computer because we have them in school and they went home with them. But if that's now the only computer they have in their households and they have four siblings doing distance learning, they would all be sharing it. So they might let their younger siblings do it during the day and then our kids would do it at like nine o'clock at night or at least work it's on like a three in the morning and things like that. So it i mean it's it's good that they can access that whenever but that that was a change with COVID for sure.

Nicole: Considering this is kind of like you know, a non traditional form of schooling and you do kind of see like, lower income or who have like, things to do during the day like how does your school kind of like market this like non traditional learning school to the kids and family

Gianna: Marketing, I gotta tell you like, awesome. Marketing must be amazing. Because if you like to think about this whole concept, it's not great. I'm like, these kids are distracted. It's not for everyone. There's no way that I would possibly have ever been a successful high school student with this model. I'm way too ADHD to do learning on my own, whether I was diagnosed or not. A lot of them are there to have fun with their friends or take a nap during the day because they can because they work on their own schedule, and it's just not successful. So their marketing must be amazing. They just started radio commercials. They just started TV commercials. At our minorly our minor league hockey arena, they have advertisement on the For billboards on the highway, they really advertise three year graduation, which is a perk for the students. And they advertise for the dual enrollment. And then for parents well, we'll have a meeting like about behavior with a kid or whatever. And they're always saying like to the parents, well, you know us we're a small school and we have small class sizes and individualized learning and good student to teacher ratios and all those good keywords to get someone to go to the school. We do have a great special ed department, and the class sizes. The most you can have in a class is 12 kids. So the student teacher teacher ratio is really amazing. It I mean, it is but in life Our computer labs. That's like ninth grades a lot, a lot of kids. So we have two ninth grades. And each computer lab has 35 kids. So that's, that's a big number. And that's the time while they're doing their independent learning and then they get pulled out of there for their classes where it would be one to 12 and they do have uniforms but they're like the most casual uniforms ever. It's just a T shirt that says VGV and khaki pants. So whether you're there because you like the uniforms or you like that, it's free for you because we're public charter. The parents don't have to pay anything, their tax dollars pay from their city or town. So that's a good feature on like a private charter. And all of our students coming because they come from every city in town and they are low income every student gets a bus Pass every month. We don't have any parking. So students and teachers take public transportation.

Will: So, um, this is more asking sort of even even sort of a clarifying off of like, as you discussed with, like, how they're able to market the school, especially to these types of kids, or warning sort of your opinion on the matter, either. So you heard about at least sort of a little bit in general, maybe even more specifics. Do you as an educator believe that this sort of far more online focused like education is more successful for students? Specifically, or is it just more easy for for teachers, is it like more beneficial in order to make it appeal to them? Like, who's benefiting the most about this like

Gianna: It's great for me, as a teacher, I don't have the lesson plan. I don't have to grade. I don't have to think about what am I doing tomorrow? I go in, I open my computer, and it's right there. And I just play the video, I answer questions. So for me, it's, as a teacher. And I think that's why I like the school so much, because as I'm there longer and longer, and I really think about it. I don't think it's great for the kids. Some of the kids do really great. But there's always that small percentage, they'll do great wherever they are. A lot of the kids need a lot of my hand holding. And it's like, you're in school all these years with your training wheels, and then you come to ninth grade and you get the training wheels off and then they don't know what to do. So who can ride their bike and some of them just fall And, I mean, my admin says that they like that I have the elementary background because I incorporate more elementary stuff a lot. And they do need that stuff still. But I don't think it's the most successful model for students. I wish there was a way that it could be done a little differently. Our school is even set up. Very interestingly, it's where I mean, Nicole, you might know but we're right in downtown Providence. So it's like any downtown think of Boston or I don't know, wherever you're from, but it's like any downtown major city. So it's tall skyscraper buildings, and we're in one of them. Like I showed up for my interview, and I didn't even notice that a school. We have. We have three schools within a one mile radius, and they had lock downs at the beginning. My first year they had a school shooting, unfortunately, and we didn't even know knock down. There was a shooting at a Dunkin Donuts nearby. We didn't go on lockdown. No one knows where a school. And so like, yeah, that's a pro. But it's also a con because we're not a school, we're an office building were like a skyscraper. And they turned it into a school and it doesn't really make sense. So, we have these big big rooms that we put a million cubicles in, and the kids sit there all day and the rooms have no windows. And if they do have windows, the blinds are to be shot. 24 seven, because admin doesn't want people knowing there are children inside, so I mean, it's kind of dark. It's kind of depressing. There's not a lot of movement. You literally like you could sit there literally a whole day. And not even like if your schedule doesn't have math or English on a Thursday. You're just in that room for the whole day. So I mean, it's not really conducive to student learning. We talked about like, I mean, not we, but like me and a co worker talk about, like, if we were to do the school differently, like we would have it in a different building, we would have classes where like the students can move. They say like, there's like arguments in school districts about physical education and having recess and how the kids need to move and our kids like, don't, they don't have art, they don't have a gym, they don't have anything. They just sit there all day. And then they either get obviously if you're sitting on a computer all day, you're they're gonna get really tired and end up taking a nap. Or you're gonna get really fidgety and like, start running around or causing problems like disruptive wise. And so those are definitely two negatives, I would say is like the setup, and the school keeps expanding and they keep trying to expand but like I don't know where they're going because we're using up like the whole bill. They keep buying other buildings. It's like it's insane. So as much as I really do like the school and I think what they're trying to do is great. I don't think it's being implemented as successfully as I could.
Nicole: So kind of like I guess to wrap things up a little bit on Do you have any questions for WIll I about, you know, maybe the work that we're doing to like help educators like you any, maybe like additional comments or recommendations and things that you should be looking into as we go forward.

Gianna: So what do you guys we do like a website or an app?

Nicole: Yes, we're going to be making a website, kind of like website platform, and we do also kind of hope to incorporate some, like tutorials and along with maybe, some pop quizzes so you know as you go along are like looking at different resources and guidelines that teachers can also gauge their understanding and learning content as well.

Gianna: Another website that you guys could check out would be vocabulary.com. I just love it. It's not math, honestly. But, um, we have a lot of professional development meetings on it, they try and get us to us every year as all content areas. And it's whether it's making a word wall or whatever, um, they have all schools in the country in the world that can compete against each other. So like we in Rhode Island can see who's the top score, who's the top school based on that. And it's more of your high performing more financially stable districts, typically, but the kids like to compete and you can earn points, but that's a good resource for Teach us as well.

Nicole: We will definitely look into this a little more.It seems like an extremely beneficial resource to also add.

Will: Well I think that wraps up Nicole and I's questions, we really want to express how much we appreciate this, and thank you so much for meeting with us today so we can learn from your experience, it is definitely going to be helpful in our project. Thank you!

Gianna: If you have any other questions feel free to reach out!

Will: Thank you, have a good rest of your day!