



Student Spotlight: Michael Pourron, Barrow

Michael Pourron, a 9th grade student at the Barrow site, followed in his older brother's footsteps when he transitioned to Foothills. Michael wasn't doing well at his traditional high school, and he had watched his brother's success at Foothills.

After transitioning, Michael felt that Foothills was a good fit for him. He enjoyed the smaller classes and the ability to work at his own pace. He also noted that teachers were there to "help if needed," but it was also okay to "just chill and do your work" if that is what was working for you.

Like all other Foothills students, though, Michael's progress was halted when Foothills sites had to close due to COVID-19. Michael initially struggled with the transition to completely remote learning. He said the biggest factor was him. He didn't always have the motivation to get online and complete his work. Added to the additional stress of having to do it all from home, Michael said he just didn't get much done. His efforts to get online were further hindered when an internet cable was cut when the family was planting a garden.

After a few weeks of not logging in to classes online, Michael was able to get back on track for two reasons. First, his sister convinced him to come to her house, use the internet, and get his work finished there. Second, Foothills assigned Michael an Academic Advocate. The new Academic Advocate Program (pg. 2) is an intervention tied directly to COVID-19. The Barrow site recognized that Michael was making great progress before COVID-19, and then his progress stopped. His Academic Advocate reached out to help figure out the barriers that Michael was experiencing.

Michael is now back on track and progressing in his classes, as he continues to work from home. Michael credits the "inspiration" that came through his advocate's text messages as what motivated him to start working on his classes again. Michael also continues to believe that Foothills is a "great school" for anyone who is struggling in the traditional high school. Way to go, Michael!



In This Issue

- **Student Spotlight: Michael Pourron, Barrow**
- **Message from the Superintendent**
- **The Why of Remote Learning Barriers**
- **Game On!, Baldwin**

Message from the Superintendent

Foothills continues to focus on our mission of providing a flexible model as we meet the needs of our students! That flexibility is more important than ever during our COVID-19 closure. In this month's issue, all of our articles focus on how our students and staff are navigating classrooms that are completely remote. Staff have engaged in a true problem-solving model to respond to barriers that our students are experiencing with remote learning, and we are continuing to do what we have always done—meet our students where they are and help them journey toward graduation. Through consistent connections with mentors and advocates, as well as incentives to encourage attendance, the Foothills staff is committed to supporting our students as they learn from home. It is difficult. It looks different. But, we are seeing the fruits of our efforts, and we are moving toward graduation one step, and one student, at a time!

Stay safe!

Sherrie



Game On! Baldwin

The Baldwin Foothills site designed a unique attendance intervention for students during COVID-19. Thinking about what would truly motivate students to make progress in their courses, staff designed incentives that balance tangible rewards with positive attention and praise from staff.

Baldwin is currently providing 4 attendance incentives:

1. Students who spend 8 or more hours a week in GradPoint receive a gas card by mail.
2. Students who complete a course in GradPoint can also earn a gas card.
3. On Thursday nights at 6pm, Baldwin staff open a virtual "game room" for students who join and compete for prizes.
4. Staff mail postcards to students weekly to let them know they are missed and that staff are "here to support them."



The "Why" of Remote Learning Barriers: Academic Advocates

Like all high schools across the state of Georgia, Foothills entered uncharted territory in mid-March when COVID-19 forced schools to close. All Foothills sites closed to in-person learning, and students moved to full remote learning. Each site set up **Instructional Plans** that outline how the site is continuing to provide instruction. The plans for each site include days and hours during the week when staff are available via Google Meet to support students as they complete their courses in GradPoint.

Yet, early on, staff realized that many students were not engaged from home. As Superintendent Dr. Sherrie Gibney-Sherman states, "We discovered, at no surprise, attendance was down after COVID-19 started. Teachers were showing up, but the kids weren't." Even students who had been coming regularly when sites were open were no longer working on their classes. Staff began to ask the question, "Why?"

School Improvement Specialist Amy Perry describes how Foothills applied a problem-solving process as part of their Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework to address the lack of engagement during COVID-19. Beginning with engagement data from each site, including attendance data and data on progress in GradPoint, staff identified a group of "critical kids." These were kids whose progress seemed to be greatly affected by COVID-19 and the site closures. Michael Pourron (pg. 1) was one of these students. Staff recognized that Michael, like many other students, had just stopped progressing when they could no longer attend classes at the Foothills site. Why?



Problem-solving model.
Source: [Florida PBIS Project](#)

Academic Advocates were identified and assigned to each student on the "critical" list. These advocates made direct contact with students, talked with them about barriers to attendance online, and then worked to address those barriers at the student level. As Foothills Regional ESOL Coordinator Shannon Hammond describes them, these Academic Advocates are "bulldogs who get after barriers that are in the way." To date, advocates have supported students in many ways. For example, they have walked students through how to login to Google Meets, helped them to make online appointments with teachers, and provided something as simple as a motivating text.

The advocates have also had many conversations with parents, which isn't usually typical at Foothills. Perry says that it's interesting how the transition to fully remote learning during COVID-19 has increased parent engagement in many cases. The Academic Advocates are often having conversations with parents, who are more involved than typical because they "can see what the kids are doing," or not, as they work from home. Perry feels that this has helped "add another layer" of support for students.

Like Michael, many students on the critical list are now re-engaged in their coursework and making progress. Yet, Perry cautions that they are just now beginning to identify data sources to support their feeling that the intervention has worked. With the help of Dale Simpson, Foothills Regional Accountability Coordinator, Perry and Hammond are looking at data points to help gauge the effectiveness of the program. They are hoping the data will support their initial assessment that the Academic Advocate Program is making a difference in student engagement.



Foothills Education Charter
High School
www.foothillscharter.org
706-795-2191 x 1476