

2020 Massachusetts Teacher of Year reflects on remote education immersion

Katie Lannan

State House News Service

The abrupt shift to remote education during the COVID-19 state of emergency left teachers and students with a lot to adjust to, according to the 2020 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year.

Takeru Nagayoshi, a New Bedford High School English teacher, briefed the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Tuesday on his experiences since schools closed in March. Nagayoshi holds hour-long live classes three times a week, with group work, office hours and check-ins the other two days, he said. The daily attendance for Nagayoshi's courses averages at about 65 percent to 85 percent, he said, with many of his students working, serving as the main child care provider for siblings, or grappling with technology and internet access issues.

"I think a lot of adults tend to make the assumption that our students are digital natives, and they're not," Nagayoshi told the board. "They're actually smartphone natives, and when it comes to using laptops, there are specific ways in which we need to explicitly teach them how to navigate, how to use all of the tools that are out there."

Some students miss the accountability and structure of the traditional classroom setting, while others can benefit from the self-guided environment and flexibility that remote learning offers, he said, encouraging education officials to think about how to retain the elements that work for some students as they plan for the uncertainty of the coming school year. For educators, Nagayoshi said, there have been "a lot of

growing pains around what it means to teach in a remote setting.”

“We’re all out of our element and, really, teaching to a bunch of little postage stamps is not the same as having in-person connection,” he said.