

## A Seamless Transition to Elearning

Back in February, when word of the first U.S. Covid-19 cases was breaking, Mr. Fitzgerald, the principal of St. John Paul II Regional Catholic School in Middletown, called a meeting to discuss designing a crisis plan. Fortunately, the school was already equipped with the technology and devices needed to run a successful eLearning program.

“It’s important to have a plan in place,” said Mr. Fitzgerald when talking about the school’s effort, “We need to be prepared for any contingency. We have to be ready to continue teaching right through the end of the school year, if need be.”

The good news? The crisis plan was easy to write and implement due to the existing infrastructure and curriculum that meant that almost all the students were already used to working online for in-class projects and homework. In 2016, the school began its 1-to-1 laptop program in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Since then, the school has expanded the program to include all the middle school grades and provided a full classroom set of laptops to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Grades 1-4 share another cart of laptops and PreK-4 have access to android tablets. When the school had to close, there were enough devices available to ensure that every student who needed access had one to take home.

In addition, the school uses Microsoft Office 365 and Teams. Karen Hoover, the school’s Technology Director explained that, “since we already had the platform and programs in place, when Mr. Fitzgerald asked me to help form a Distance Learning Plan, using Office 365 was a natural choice. The students in grades 2 through 8 all have experience using the Microsoft Products.” She went on to explain that Teams for Education had everything teachers needed to successfully teach classes, assign and grade work and assessments, and communicate with each other, students, and parents. Many of the students already used Teams for communication and collaboration for class projects, and the Crisis Plan included getting all the students ready to use Teams for distance learning by the middle of March.

When the call came to shut down the school as of Monday, March 16, the students were prepared, and the teacher training was already scheduled for that day. By the end of the day, Mrs. Hoover had a dedicated Help Desk email set up to fully support parents and students with the transition to online learning. The school website and social media accounts have also been used to keep parents in the loop. “The teachers have all done an amazing job. I am incredibly proud of every single one of them,” said Mr. Fitzgerald. “They have put in long hours using technology in new ways to create an educational solution that provides a sense of normalcy and continuity for our students and their families. Online classes began on Tuesday – the school didn’t miss a single day. We are taking attendance, meeting with students online, collecting assignments, and giving assessments. Even classes such as Music, Art, P.E. and Spanish are all online.”

Tiffany Ruvolo, a senior administrator for the school, remarked, “Thank God that we have an administration and staff with the foresight to plan ahead and the means to make it happen. We are fortunate to have such a dedicated school community that is willing to step out of their comfort zones and into the future of education. St. John Paul II School is committed to serving the needs of our students and their families in these challenging times.”