

# "I've been really proud to be a Catholic School parent"

## Parents describe the transition to remote learning for Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System

PITTSSTON — Sticking to a routine has helped the Riley family adjust to distance learning within the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System.

"I have been really astounded at how the process has gone," mother Anita Riley said.

Riley's daughter, Ava, 7, is currently a first grade student at Holy Rosary School in Duryea.

"We were immediately prepared. We started that Monday after the closure and we were doing school work, which for my daughter allowed her to continue that routine," Riley said. "I've been really proud to be a Catholic school parent!"

Constant communication from school administration has helped ease fear and concern and facilitated a smooth transition.

"We still feel like a community even though we are apart," Riley added.

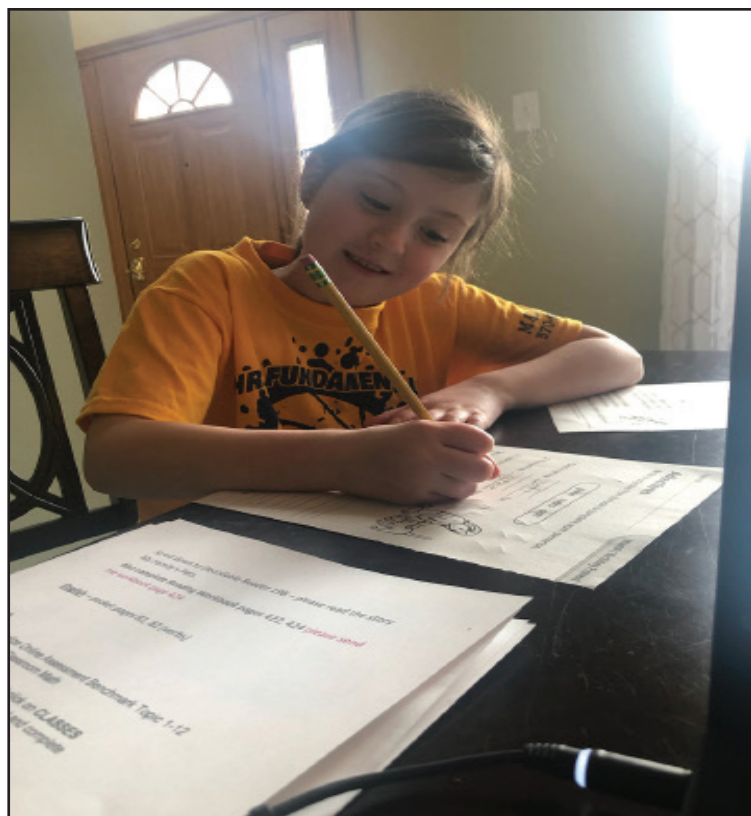
The Riley family also credits the hard work and dedication of teachers, many of whom are available to answer questions about assignments at any time.

"The teachers have been nothing short of amazing," Riley said. "The passion, how much they care about the students and how sad they are to not be teaching has been relayed to us and felt genuinely from day one."

The Nealon family in Archbald agrees with those sentiments regarding the transition to distance learning and the dedication of the Catholic school faculty.

"I can't be more impressed with the way they handled it," father Jack Nealon said. "You can plan for fire drills and snow days, I can't imagine how they planned for this. But the way they executed it was very well-prepared and very deliberate."

The Nealon family has two boys, Riley and Brayden, who are students at La Salle Academy in Jessup. Riley is an eighth grade student and Brayden is in fourth grade.



**Ava Riley, 7, a first grade student at Holy Rosary School in Duryea does a distance learning assignment from her Pittston home.**

"You can really tell that the kids were the first priority; the safety of the kids, the normalcy for the kids and the academics, there was really no lapse in that," Nealon added.

While certainly not the ideal way to learn, the Nealon family is thankful for technology that allows students and teachers to stay connected, including Google Classroom. Preparing for each school day actually starts the night before.

"The evening before, my wife will get emails from all the boys' teachers. It's not just math and English, but it's also the music teacher and the gym teacher. It is the full curriculum!" Nealon said. "They couldn't have planned for it, they couldn't have seen this coming, but they were on top of it."

La Salle Academy principal, Ellen Murphy, said the entire educational team works together to provide children the continuity of skills and opportunity for academic growth.

"It was an extraordinary challenge that was met by

extraordinary people," Murphy remarked. "They immediately went to the mode of 'we can do this.' There was some fear and concern but they supported each other and they worked together. I can't say enough about how well the faculty works with each other and they support each other."

Murphy believes a lot of the credit for the success of distance learning also belongs to parents.

"I think the parents have shown incredible strength. This is very difficult to assume this role in their children's lives. They're partnering with the teachers to do what they can to make life a little more normal," she said.

Murphy personally sees all of the lessons of educators and has been added as a co-teacher in many video conferences. That gives her the unique perspective of being able to see all the online lesson plans in action.

"I watched a teacher's lesson. She had a white board in her parlor and she filmed herself explaining a math concept to the

students. It was just amazing and she was available for them via the Google Classroom for questions as she was explaining this lesson and they were beginning to work the concept," Murphy said.

La Salle Academy currently has 200 students ranging from pre-school to eighth grade.

While the educational process has been turned upside-down in many regards, Murphy said one important thing remains constant.

"The most important part of every lesson plan is that every teacher begins with a prayer and encouragement," Murphy said. "To keep that prayer consistent and to remind each other of the need for prayer, that's the most important part of every lesson that we're doing every day."

Kristen Donohue, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, said all 20 schools within the Diocese of Scranton have now moved into the fourth marking period. After initially reviewing information, teachers are now introducing new concepts and students are completing assignments that are graded.

"We feel very confident going into the fourth marking period that we're able to provide

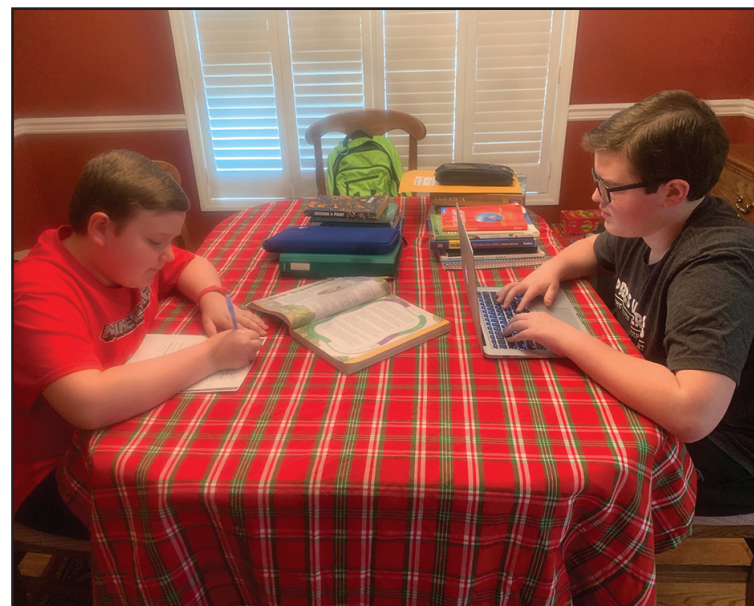
a quality education for our students," Donohue said.

Since March 16, 2020, when distance learning began, Donohue said educators have been constantly refining the process to make it the best it can be. They have been sharing best practices to make the virtual educational experience the best it can be.

"We're extremely proud of how our principals and teachers have transitioned overnight and planned to prepare for our students in the most compassionate and strategic way to be able to continue that education and know that was the most important priority for students to continue education even though we weren't able to access our buildings," she added.

Moving forward, administrators are now working to plan for milestone events like graduations, especially in the high schools, to give seniors the recognition they deserve.

"Nothing has been formalized yet but these students have worked so hard and our families have sacrificed so much to make this happen. We just want to make sure we give our seniors the recognition they deserve, in a genuine, authentic and creative way," Donohue added.



**Brayden Nealon, left, and his brother, Riley Nealon, right, both students at La Salle Academy in Jessup, work on distance learning activities from their home in Archbald.**



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*The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.*

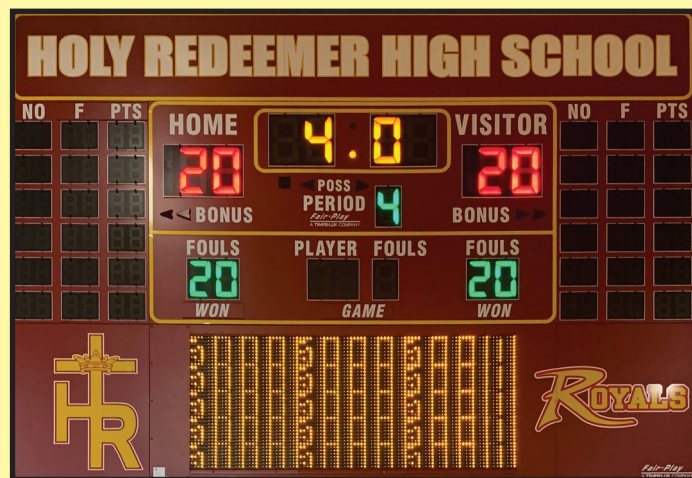
All four Diocesan high schools participated in the “Be the Light” campaign on Friday, April 17, 2020, joining hundreds of other schools in Pennsylvania. The campaign honors all students from the Class of 2020 who had their senior year cut short during the COVID-19 pandemic. Scoreboards displayed 20-20 in honor of this year’s graduating class, while 4 and 19 were displayed signifying COVID-19. For football fans, the 4 and 19 indicates the crisis is on its final down.



Holy Cross High School



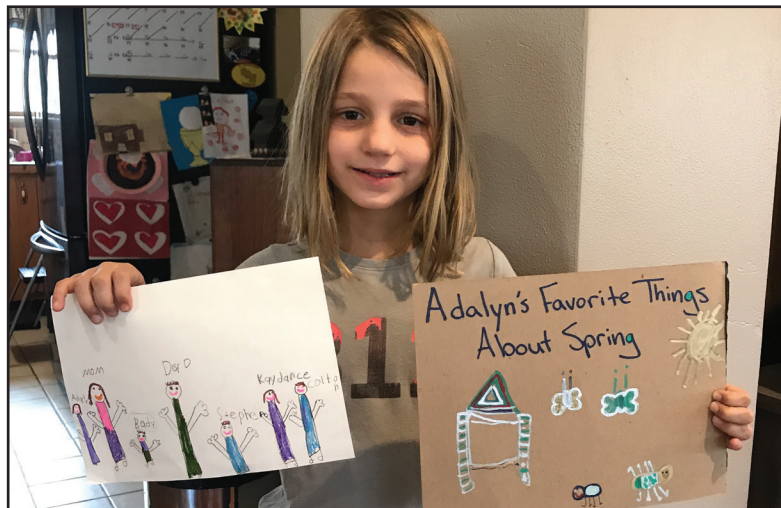
Saint John Neumann High School



Holy Redeemer High School



Notre Dame High School



Adalyn Meixel, a kindergarten student at Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport, shows some of the assignments she has been working on since distance learning began for all students.



Nicole Siciliano, Senior Class President at Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg, works on Honors Calculus via Google Classroom.





Third grade students from **La Salle Academy in Jessup** sent cards to residents at the Mid Valley Senior Center. Staff members from the senior center, which is also located in Jessup, have since informed the students that the cards were hung on the residents' doors so they could regularly see them.

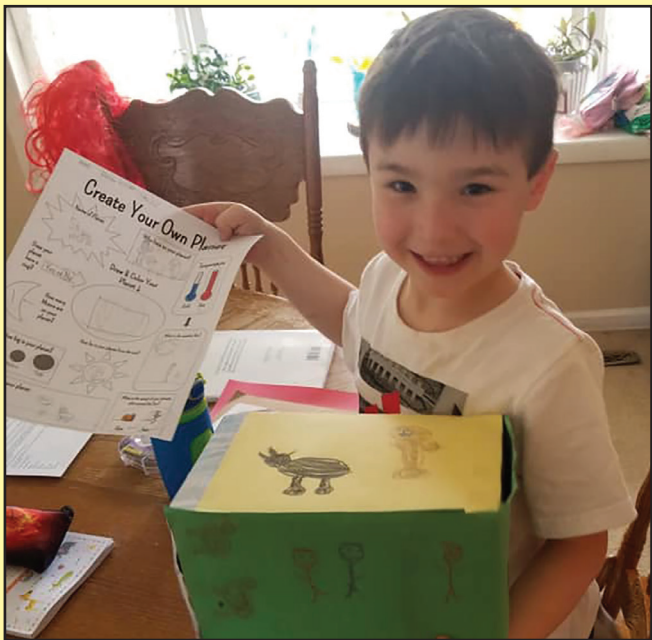


First graders from **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** were recently “Zooming” with their teacher, Mrs. Layaou, as she sits in her makeshift classroom.



Victoria Sabetta, a kindergarten student at **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter**, works on a coding project from home as part of the school's distance learning program.

Randall Skuba, a student at **Holy Family Academy in Hazleton**, is all smiles as he shows his first grade project which involved making a planet system.



Nikko Lesoine, a first grade student at **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg**, works on a STREAM (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Arts, Math) assignment as part of the school's distance learning program.



The Thompson siblings, twins Aiden & Erin are fifth graders and little sister Katie is in first grade, celebrate virtual Spirit Day at **Monsignor McHugh School in Cresco** from high atop their castle.

Students from the third grade class at **Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston** were spreading God's love through the cards they made for the residents at Mercy Center Skilled Nursing Unit in Dallas.

