

Keeping a commitment to growth and instruction

Diocesan Catholic School System transitions to distance learning

SCRANTON – It is now quickly approaching one month since all schools in Pennsylvania closed at the direction of Governor Tom Wolf, but for students in the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System, the learning process continues.

When the governor made the initial announcement to shut down schools on March 13, 2020, teachers had already been preparing to transition to distance learning and instituted the change on the next school day, Monday, March 16, 2020.

“The Novel Coronavirus has created unusual and uncertain times for all of us,” Superintendent Kristen Donohue said. “We have been working diligently to fulfill our promise in this new environment and we continue our dedication to growth and instruction for our students.”

Instead of traditional face-to-face instruction, teachers now email daily lessons to the parents of students in each of their classes. Over the last three weeks, educators have been able to assess that work and are now beginning to transition into the fourth marking period for students.

“With schools statewide closed indefinitely at this time, each of our schools have been sharing plans with parents for the instruction of new material as well as due dates for assignments and assessments,” Donohue added.

All school buildings are currently closed. Each building has undergone a deep cleaning and sanitization process in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In addition to teachers working remotely, administrators are also working from home but are still accessible by email.



Brother and sister Dominick and Victoria Ferrentino, students at Holy Rosary School in Duryea, work on their daily online lessons together while the Diocesan Catholic School System is in the middle of distance learning due to the COVID-19 virus.

“We appreciate the cooperation and patience of every family during this unusual time,” Jason Morrison, Diocesan Secretary of Catholic Education/Chief Executive Officer, said. “We have always believed that our Catholic school parents are partners in their child’s education and they have truly risen to the occasion to help the educational process continue.”

During the last few weeks, the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System has been sending out regular communications to families. Individual schools have been using their websites and social media platforms to spread important messages as well.

Many faculty and administrators have relied on Zoom video conference

technology to continue instruction. Some schools across the Diocese have also held “virtual spirit weeks” to maintain student engagement.

Epiphany School in Sayre has even created a “Daily Facebook Challenge” where students of all grade levels can connect and share their creativity. For example, this week students were asked to share pictures of their Easter decorations or share a picture of an Easter art project from their family.

While these unusual times have directly impacted students, they’ve also impacted school administrators and faculty.

“I miss the kids terribly,” Jim Jones, principal of Good Shepherd Academy in

Kingston, told Father Alex Roche during a podcast posted on the Good Shepherd Academy website.

During the 30 minute recording, Jones and Father Roche talked about ways to keep kids motivated and positive while schools are closed. They also discussed what it is like teaching and administering a school virtually.

“I want to thank the teachers that have been going above and beyond the call of duty and helping provide some normalcy in this really abnormal time,” Jones said.

Jones urged parents to tap into their child’s known schedule and what they are familiar with. For example, Catholic School students are familiar with starting their school day with prayer.

“Have them start their day with prayer, let them follow their routines,” Jones said.

Jones added that it is important to make sure kids continue doing physical activities. Having dinner together and creating conversation are also positive ideas.

“It’s okay to not have answers because there’s not a lot of answers to be had. We’re learning hourly through this pandemic. I think it is okay for parents to not have the answers,” Jones added.

While some parents may still be working a normal schedule and struggling to find a “new normal,” Jones added, “you are not alone. Reach out to those of us that might be able to help you through a tough time.”

For the latest information on how Diocese of Scranton Catholic Schools are impacted by the coronavirus, visit www.dioceseofscranton.org/catholic-schools.

Parents share ideas on how to make sudden onset of home schooling work

CLEVELAND (CNS) -- With kids at home because schools are closed and online education on tap for at least several more weeks, parents are wondering how to ensure that learning continues.

For Catholic home-schooling families though, having kids learn at home is the norm.

Longtime home-schoolers told Catholic News Service the current moment gives parents the chance to spend more one-on-one time with their children while teaching skills and creating memories to cherish for a lifetime.

“You have to look at this as a blessing of the gift of time and opportunity for (parents) to reclaim the responsibility as primary educators of their children,” said Aimee Murphy of Holy Family Catholic Homeschoolers in Orange County, California. She began teaching her children at home 11 years ago. Two daughters are in college while sons, 6, 12 and 16 years old, are home-schooled.

Murphy and other parents in the Orange County group acknowledged that

as rewarding as home schooling is, it still requires “petitioning for the grace from God you need to carry on,” as well as patience and perseverance.

Murphy, Tomi Carroll, of the VERITAS Homeschool Support Association in Bedford, Indiana, and Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur of Western Massachusetts Catholic Homeschoolers in Springfield, Massachusetts, recommended that parents step back and realize that there is no need to recreate the classroom at home.

And while teaching kids at home can be challenging, Fagnant-MacArthur said, “it’s an enjoyable challenge.”

Kids of all ages can learn through everyday activities, said Fagnant-MacArthur, who writes the Today’s Catholic Homeschooling blog. It’s important to recognize, she added, that even though a student’s school may have set requirements to complete certain assignments, learning is not limited to a computer screen.

Creativity is important, the parents also stressed. For example, younger children

especially can learn by joining in just about any home activity; they can learn about fractions by following a recipe or can better understand biology by observing wildlife in a backyard or a park.

The three mothers offered a series of suggestions to make learning enjoyable for the entire family:

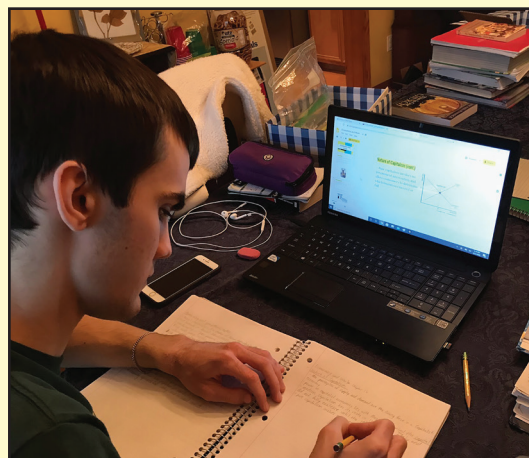
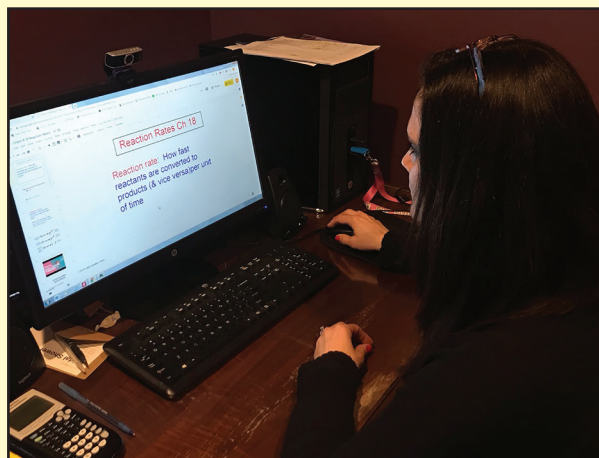
- **Prayer and faith formation.** For students in public school, there is no chance to pray during the day. Murphy’s family starts each day with prayer. Short breaks are built in for the Angelus prayer, Chaplet of Divine Mercy or to read about a saint whose feast day is being observed.
- **Establish a routine.** “Don’t let it be ad hoc” without specific guidance for a child, Murphy said. “But also be flexible. It’s a learning curve for you and for them.”
- **Reading.** Reading is an important part of schooling at home. The families read aloud with children by their side and silently. Any reading time can then be

followed by a discussion that reviews what was read, the message an author was trying to convey, or to build anticipation for the next part of a book.

- **Experiences.** Some kids learn best through experiences, observing or creating art. Murphy encouraged parents to provide plenty of new experiences outside of book or screen learning to their children.
- **Writing.** Children can compose a story or a play. For young children just learning to write, have them dictate a story as a parent writes it down. Kids can illustrate the story or act out a play. Costumes can be made from old clothing and materials.
- **Virtual museum tours.** Although museums and other public buildings are closed, many continue to offer virtual tours highlighting displays and exhibits. Parents can take advantage of such offerings because they are rich in information and are free.

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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.



Mrs. Nicole Peeney, science teacher at **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg**, creates distance learning material for her students while her son, Notre Dame senior Justin Peeney, works on his online lessons.



Students at **All Saints Academy in Scranton** enjoyed a "Virtual Spirit Week" to help boost student morale. Timothy Moore, a second grader, participates in "Dress to Impress Day."



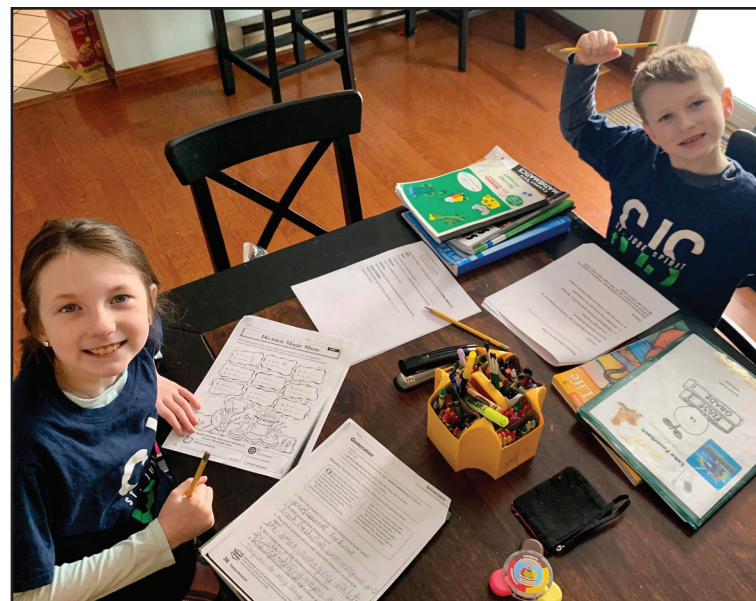
The O'Shea family, whose students attend **Good Shepherd Academy** in Kingston, celebrates their own GSA Spirit Day donning Guardian Blue and Gold. Grant is in kindergarten and Emmie is in fourth grade.



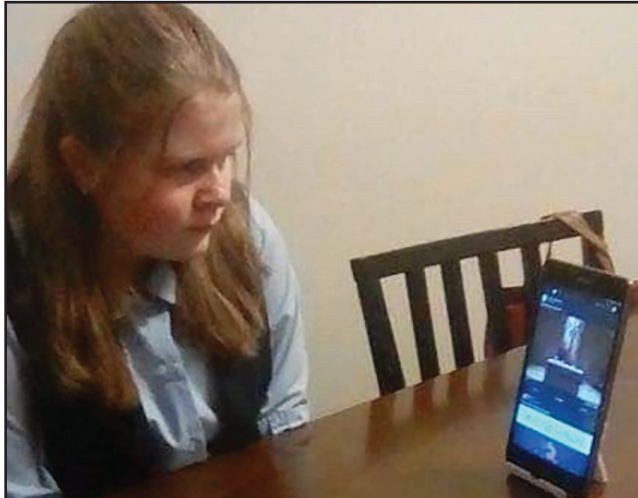
Madelyn Weigle, a second grade student at **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport**, and her brother Joey Pontious, a seventh grader at the high school, show off their artistic ability on a stained glass window art project at home.



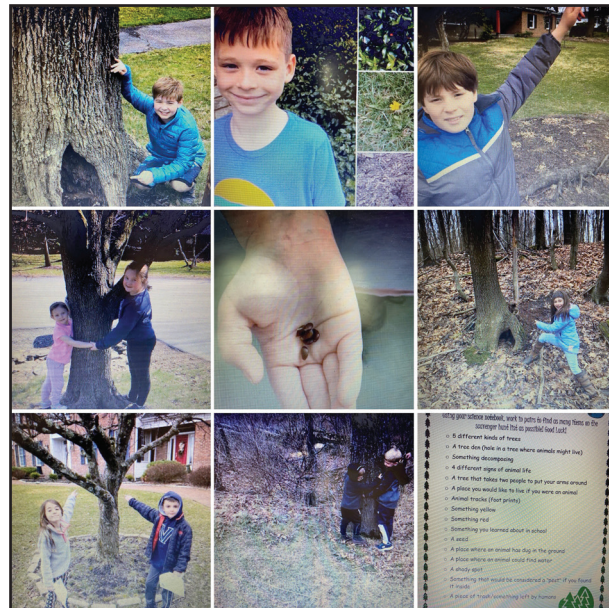
The kindergarten class at **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton** is trying to make the world a little brighter with their rainbow project. Mrs. Burke and Mrs. Fadyen, kindergarten teachers, challenged their students to create a colorful rainbow and an inspirational message to help spread cheer during the school closure.



Hannah and Luke Fauerbach, third and first graders at **Saint Jude School in Mountain Top**, work on assignments as part of the school's distance learning program.



Wearing her school Mass uniform, Brooke Allen, a fifth grade student at **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter**, attends online Sunday Mass.



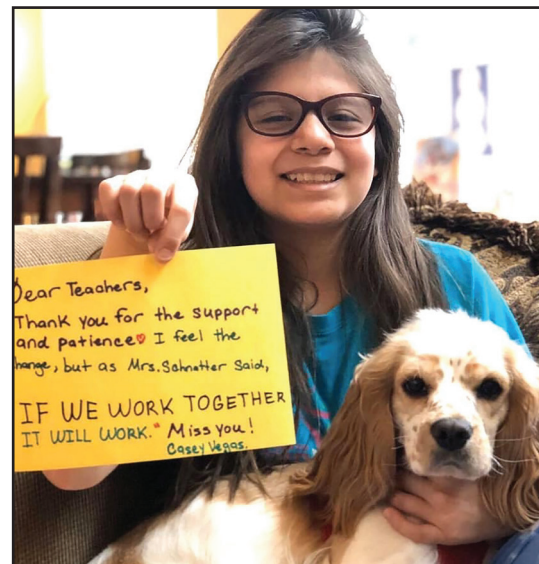
Second and third grade students from **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** share pictures of their ecosystem scavenger hunt.



The DeCosmo Family dressed up for "Virtual Career Day" at **Holy Family Academy in Hazleton**. Melia is in kindergarten, Gia is in third grade and Michael will be in Pre-K next year.



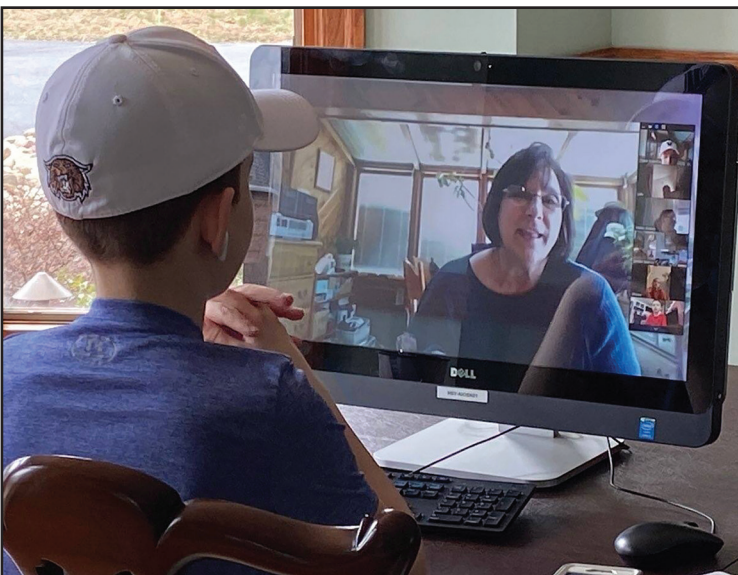
Mrs. Paula Mohutsky, music teacher at **Saint Nicholas-Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre**, presents a music lesson about instruments to kindergarten students using Zoom Conference technology.



Casey Vegas, a sixth grade student at **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg**, shares a message of hope and support to her teachers.



Kane Wright, a ninth grade student at **Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport**, works on a distance learning project on his laptop.



Chase Sciandra, a fifth grade student at **Holy Rosary School in Duryea**, participates in a Zoom classroom get together with his classmates and teacher, Mrs. Betsy Kozak.

The faculty and administration at **Epiphany School in Sayre** are using a variety of internet platforms to keep families connected during distance learning. One example is their "Daily Facebook Challenge" where students in all grade levels are asked to perform tasks that can enrich their learning such as creating thank you notes to medical professionals and costumes to become a "Reading Super Hero." In this photo, students display their entries for "Epiphany's Tallest Tower Engineering Challenge."

