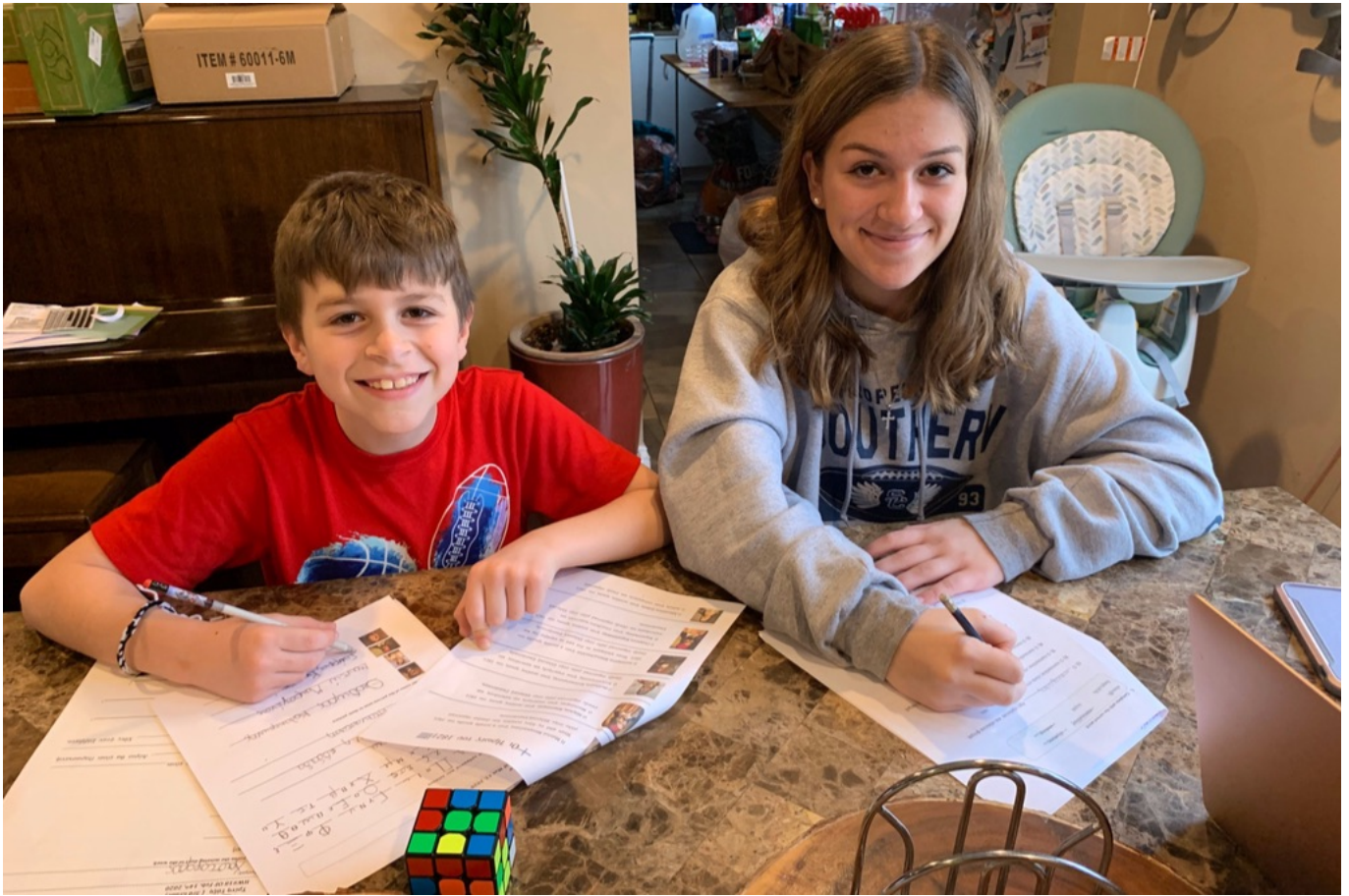


26/05/2020

Greek American Day Schools Transition to On-Line Learning



In response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affecting our world, all of the Greek-American Day and Afternoon School programs across the country were forced to suspend in school classes and transition to on-line instruction. The decision to close the school buildings was made in mid-March following government regulations to quarantine, and at the direction of the Department of Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, in order to ensure the health and safety of our students, teachers, administrators and their families.

The majority of our Parochial Day and Afternoon Greek School Programs have executed successful on-line learning tools in order to provide the most effective educational instructions to their students. To assist the parish schools and programs during these difficult times each Educational Director from the Metropolises and the Direct Archdiocesan District has been in consultation with

their schools and programs, providing them with guidance and support as they navigate through these difficult circumstances.

Today, our students across the country are engaged in learning and communicating with their teachers via Zoom, Skype, Google Classroom, and Kahoot, as well as other learning platforms. Administrators and teachers have become experienced in this method of education and have been actively adjusting by training teachers, students and parents to further enhance the student experience from home. Some of the schools have also hired part time school counselors to provide further services to the students.



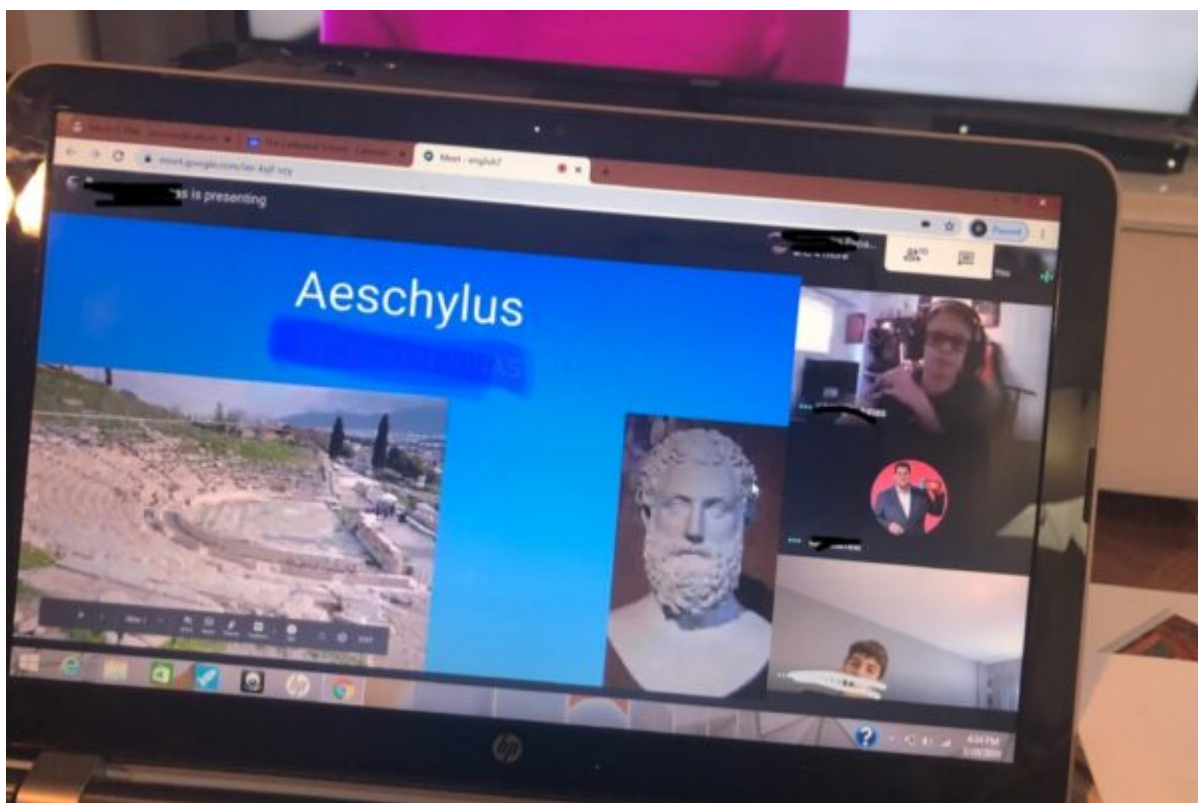
In addition, the High Council for Greek Education, under the guidance of President of the Board Ms. Athina Kromidas, meets to review and discuss issues our schools are facing during these challenging times and how the Council can offer their support. The High Council consists of members throughout the United States, which gives it the ability to help all schools nationwide.

Dr. Anastasios Koularmanis, the Director of the Office of Greek Education, is in contact with Greek Day Schools as well as Parish Afternoon Language Programs. The Department holds meetings with the administrators of the programs so that they can share and understand their challenges and help find solutions. The Department continues to communicate with schools, not only with items pertaining

to virtual learning, but also to review methods of offering emotional support to students and families, as well as share information received from various Health and State Education agencies.

Ms. Athina Philippou, the District Director for Parochial Day School administrators, reports that the New York area parochial schools have transitioned to on-line learning successfully and students are using similar on-line learning tools.

For instance, the Cathedral School of Holy Trinity in Manhattan reports a successful changeover to virtual learning. Head of School Ms. Francesca Mannino had been monitoring the situation in New York City and was preparing her teachers, students and parents. She took a proactive approach and during the week of March 9 held training session for teachers while they were still in the schools. Her office manager and technology teacher held lessons for teachers and trained middle school students on Google Hangouts, simulating how to teach and how the system would look. On Friday, March 13 students and pupils packed their backpacks and bags and closed their physical doors.



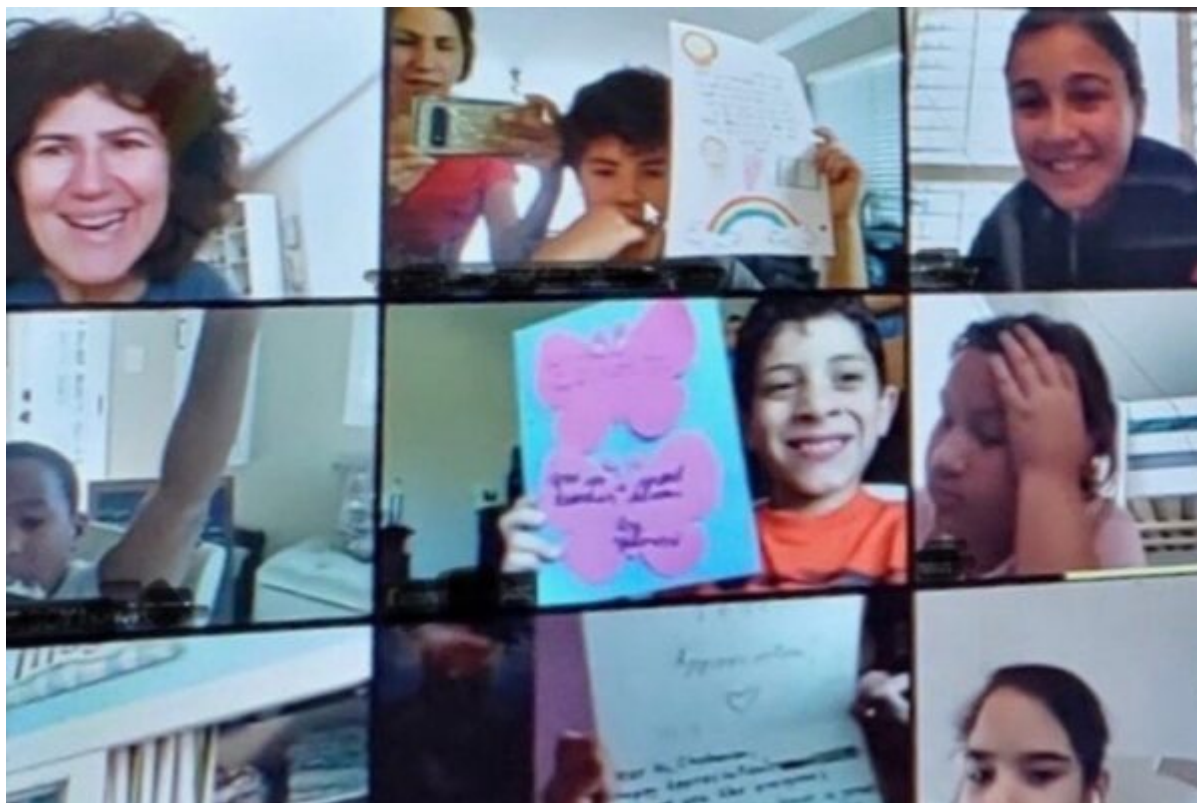
Ms. Mannino is extremely proud of how everyone has adjusted stating, "The transition was seamless. Our teachers have carried through this like champs. They had a crash course in mechanics but there was no specific training on actually teaching virtually. They have responded positively and the parents are grateful that

their children have structure, accountability and social connection, especially during this tragic time. " Eight classes per day are held, with a short break between each one. School starts at the same time and specials are held as usual. Classes have not stopped, except for Easter break, parent/teacher conferences were held virtually, and report cards have been distributed. Students also take virtual field trips and Ms. Mannino is now working on virtual graduation ceremonies for Pre-K, Kindergarten and Eighth Grade. She is satisfied that the school was prepared for the quarantine and is glad that the children meet with their teachers and their friends daily in order to keep the social and emotional connections, "They are happy to see their teacher every day."

When asked how the children will respond to coming back to the physical school, she feels that it will be a happy time but it will also be a time for a deeper reflection on what their lives were like during the past months. She knows, however, that the children will soon get back to the rhythm of education and learning together.

In Brooklyn, at the A. Fantis School of Sts. Constantine & Helen Cathedral, remote learning began the week of March 16, after two days of teacher training. Principal Theodore Tasoulas reports that the School uses Zoom with live instruction. Pre-K through 3rd grades have two short meetings in the morning that set-up the day's instruction and provide guidance and activities for parents. K-4th grades have four 50-minute periods and the middle school offers five periods of 50 minutes. Teachers can vary the lessons by having students work in small groups, independently or together. Virtual field trips are also scheduled. Other innovative ideas include live classes for all grades in physical education and adapting the Hellenic Studies Department to virtual by using video clips and performances in a webinar format that allows up to 500 guests for interaction and questions.

Mr. Tasoulas says that while the beginning was a learning experience for teachers they have truly been amazing. He has received emails and calls from the parents showing their appreciation. "Crisis builds character, and our teachers really showed their dedication to our school and families."



Koraes Elementary School of Sts. Constantine and Helen Church in Palos Hills, IL, also closed their doors on March 13 based on State and District guidelines and directives. Principal Beth Lind reports that the school is using various tools for on-line learning including Google Classroom, Hangouts, Zoom, NEWSOLA, Readworks and Common Lit. Virtual science experiments are conducted with STEM and STEAM activities according to grade and subject. Ms. Lind states that the school is offering much more than state guidelines have directed and the response to the online transition has been positive by teachers, students and parents. Some innovative programs that have been put into place include one-on-one meetings and office hours for students who need extra support. Lunch dates with students are also an important part of the day because eating lunch and connecting with their classmates helps students maintain important emotional connections. Ms. Lind says that it's vital to teach the whole child.

When the students return to Koraes in the fall Ms. Lind imagines that, "While they will be thrilled to return to school, they will be cautious to interact with peers. I believe that they will fall back into their routine pretty quickly – however they will need time to adjust to a new structure given unknown guidelines for returning to school."



In Houston, TX, at the Annunciation Orthodox School, Alisa Eng, Director of Curriculum and Instructional Support, reports that the student body is responding well to the transition to on-line learning. The school educates about 700 students in grades Pre-K – 8th grade and the curriculum has adjusted in each of these age groups. While they already were using chrome books, I-pads and laptops at an early age, the school made sure that each household had the technology in place to make sure that the students were able to log on without missing a day and offered to supply the home if technology was needed.

Ms. Eng says that the school has also focused on the emotional piece especially for the younger grades because learning is very different for both teachers and students when there is no one to interact with. To add some normalcy to the school day, the student presented program “Daily Dolphin News” is still being produced and daily morning prayers continue to be sent out. Physical Education and enrichment classes such as art are very popular with the children but have been adjusted by recognizing that supplies may not be available in the home. A virtual Olympics was held as well as an on-line Concert. She states, “You can’t replace, but you can adjust. We always think about what is best for the child and we must remember that you have to give grace.”

In California, at St. Nicholas School in Northridge, outside of Los Angeles, Rev. Fr. Michael Prevas reports that the school has transitioned all of their 260 students to an on-line remote learning environment, making that decision on March 13th. On

Wednesday, March 18 the School was fully immersed in distance learning using a variety of educational tools that keep in mind the age groups and attention levels of the students, whose grades range from Pre-school to 8th grade. With the motto of “ongoing excellence in education”, the teachers offer educational programming for toddlers age 18-months with live interactive Zoom gatherings such as circle time and reading activities. Weekly art projects are delivered to the students on their doorstep by teachers who wave and say hi through the door.

Elementary education teachers also meet via Zoom providing students with real time lessons and feedback. Additionally, students attend weekly Greek, music, religion, physical education and art classes. Middle school teachers and students use school issued chrome books to be able to follow their daily schedules and have smoothly made this transition. For extra help and to answer any questions both students and their parents can visit the on-line daily office hours.

Fr. Prevas commented that students are taking initiative in their education while teachers’ technology skills have flourished. He reminds us that, “While technology is doing an amazing job of keeping the learning going it does not replace the hands-on learning the children receive by being in class and learning together.” He looks forward to the children when they return saying, “There is no greater joy than seeing the smiling faces bring our campus back to life.”

Photo Credit: Melissa Randall

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