



ALL SOULS

THE SCOOP

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Prepared for a Pandemic?

The Office of Catholic Schools made the call on the night of Thursday March 12, 2020. Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Denver would pause in-person learning for two weeks as a result of growing health and safety concerns from the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Principal Tracy Alarcon and Early Learning Center (ELC) Director Sally Wallace moved quickly; students at All Souls Catholic School in Englewood would not miss a day of learning. Alarcon recalls, "I got the call at 9 p.m. and immediately changed the agenda for the professional development meeting we had scheduled for our teachers and staff the next morning. We met that Friday, and the teachers used the weekend to put our remote learning plan into action. By Monday at noon, all of our students had picked up their materials and classes immediately resumed that day. We didn't miss a beat." As a community proudly "Grounded in Faith and Prepared to Soar," it turns out that the foundation for success in remote learning began as a larger technology and curriculum plan put into motion by a committee of educators and parents six years earlier.

Now the Director of Technology at All Souls Catholic Parish and School, Gia Yoder remembers the early work of that committee. "We drew from the professional IT experience of a number of parents and really worked hard to assess and develop a thorough and sustainable plan for integrating technology into the education at All Souls." The results of their efforts in the following years have included campus-wide technology upgrades, wireless access, a secure firewall, new iMac computers, MacBook for teachers and staff, and iPads for students. With the framework and infrastructure in place, the school leadership along with the faculty, has now spent the last few years developing how technology is applied in the classroom to enhance the overall academic experience for students. "It has been really important to us how we integrate technology into the classroom. We've been very focused on maintaining a hands-on, collaborative learning environment, using technology very carefully to enhance curriculum and engage students." says Yoder.

When the virus forced schools to switch to remote learning this year, All Souls teachers and students were more ready to take the leap than they thought. As a part of their school-provided professional development, teachers had been trained in how to use and, more importantly, how to integrate technology into their daily classroom experience. "It really came down to our teachers." says Yoder, "They were the key contributors who combined the technology with all of their training and tweaked it to fit their remote classrooms. They became very comfortable with it." All Souls students were prepared as well. Important to the work of that early committee, was the job of selecting the best platform to deliver technology education in each classroom and also in the Technology Class offered to students in grades K-8th. "We utilize Microsoft Office 365 and Microsoft Teams, not only because we think it is the best school productivity and collaboration platform, but because of its practical application in the business world. We can provide students with actual, real world skill-building that they can always

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return to later in life. Our students also know how to use the technology responsibly, because a large area of focus for All Souls has always been to instill in our students responsible use of technology as a good digital citizen.” said Yoder.

Nearly three months of remote learning later, this challenge has become a story of success for All Souls. Per Alarcon, “Our teachers truly honored the instructional minutes required by the Archdiocese of Denver. Our priority was to provide content-filled time with students, to touch base with them in multiple ways each day, and to maintain the highest academic standards.” All Souls teachers continued to teach with multiple live classes each day, with projects, reports, tests, and experiments.

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For many parents, the connection to school and the community provided structure and familiarity in a very unstable time. “Teachers were available and worked to meet each family where they were and remained committed to seeing each child succeed.” says All Souls parent of four, Katie Cambruzzi. “As we got into the groove of distance learning, it became apparent that it wasn’t about meeting minimum requirements or checking a box. It was truly about continuing to educate the students and ensuring that they learned the material. The staff’s devotion has never been more obvious.”

With the confidence from nearly three months of successful remote learning, and school on break for the summer, the big question now is what will learning look like at All Souls in the fall? As Tracy Alarcon explains, “Our priority is in-person learning for the fall. We know as educators, that children learn better in person and in the classroom together. It is our responsibility to be prepared for any scenario, and we will follow all directives from the health department, but as much as possible we want our kids in the classroom.” ELC Director Sally Wallace agrees and also emphasizes, “It is important to all of us to understand, as students, teachers or parents, that regardless of the learning format, our interdisciplinary method of curriculum, the strength of our community, and the core values that make us All Souls, will always continue.” Alarcon and Wallace are busy planning for another school year.

Part of the preparation is to dig deeply into all learning projects and targets and understand how to move between in-person and remote teaching for each if necessary. “We continue to work on the professional development of our teachers to help them build their toolkit and offer more quality remote instruction, but only if we have to move to that format.” qualifies Alarcon. Wallace has already added an additional ELC classroom and teacher for the fall, utilizing space in the K-8 building, to keep class sizes small and honor social distancing guidelines in the preschool. “I am looking forward to continuing to provide the same program offering that All Souls’ ELC has for the last several years.” For her part, Yoder is moving ahead with the All Souls technology plan, but with a little more clarity in its design. “Our faculty was able to reach every All Souls student while school was conducted remotely. We will continue to explore ways to leverage technology for teachers and students regardless of where the All Souls education is taking place.” For now, though, rest assured, whatever the future brings, All Souls will be as always, Grounded in Faith and Prepared to Soar. Even in a pandemic.

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