March 20, 2020

Reflections from the Head of School, George Zeleznik, on the first week of Crefeld from Home.

The NAIS Annual Conference was held on February 27 and 28, and we all learned a great deal more about COVID-19 during that time. On the first night of the conference, a member of the Leadership Team participated in the Coronavirus special session, took notes, and shared them with the team (this would be the first of many webinars Crefeld participated in to learn as much as possible about the growing situation). Several discussions followed, both during and immediately following the conference, on Crefeld’s immediate need to develop a distance learning program.

February 29: Leadership Team worked jointly, all day, on an initial plan.
March 1:
- A Letter from the Head went to the Crefeld Community alerting families that a distance learning program was being developed.
- The Crefeld School was professionally sanitized/cleaned.

March 2: Leadership Team met first thing in the morning to talk about how to move our program online. It’s decided that a test day needs to occur to see how this is going to work. Platforms to be used include Google Classroom (already in use), Remind, and Zoom to simulate the classroom experience from home.
March 3: Zoom account upgraded so all staff can have access.
March 4: At 6:00pm, two Zoom classes full of teachers and staff are held to train all on how best to use Zoom’s capabilities.

March 5/6: Leadership Team assisted staff who experienced difficulty during the March 4 Zoom class.
March 6: A 2nd Letter from the Head is sent home telling families to keep their children home on Wednesday, March 11, so we can test Crefeld from Home day.
March 7/8: All staff are given Zoom homework over the weekend; customized Zoom tutorials are provided. Progress is tracked using Google Sheets, with staff verifying that they could independently use several critical features of Zoom.
March 9:
- Instead of holding our usual all school Morning Meeting in the Commons, all students went to their advisories to participate in a Zoom Morning Meeting. The purpose was to introduce students to the platform in a comfortable setting.
- That same day, in advisories, every advisor held small Zoom rooms in advisory so students could practice.
March 10: Zoom orientations / support occurred in advisories for students who experienced difficulties on March 9 or were absent. Students with critical barriers were identified and received individual tech assistance and, in some cases, received Chromebooks to take home.

March 11: We held a Crefeld from Home beta test. All students and teachers stayed home. Students ran through an abbreviated schedule of all their classes on the Zoom platform. All links to classes were embedded into their already existing Google Classroom accounts. I held Morning Meeting from an empty Commons, and the non-teaching staff was on campus troubleshooting any issues.

March 12:
- All students returned to school for one last day in the building. Addressed, in person, any issues that arose the day before. I held an all school meeting at noon announcing that Crefeld would be closed for three weeks, starting at the end of the day. Spring Break is to immediately follow as planned, allowing a minimum of 4 ½ weeks out of the building.
- Held a staff meeting at the end of the day, alerting staff to pack up everything that they will need to teach from home for an extended period of time.

March 13: Optional inservice day for any staff who needed help. A full staff meeting was held via Zoom at noon.

March 13: At 3:00pm, Governor Wolf closed all schools for two weeks.

March 16: Successful launch of Crefeld from Home.

March 17: The first virtual Coffee with the Head for parents is held via Zoom at 7:30am.

Friday, March 20, we finished our first successful week of Crefeld from Home. I begin each day at 8:30am, as usual, with an all school Zoom Morning Meeting. Students and staff come together to celebrate birthdays, and I call on students/staff to make announcements. In this large group, everyone is muted until called upon; I learned that lesson very early on (130+ people unmuted is loud, very loud). Students are not muted in their classes, as class sizes are much smaller and more manageable. In preparation for this week, the Dean of Faculty surveyed teaching staff and created a schedule that focuses on critical skill development using a “less is more” approach. The afternoons are dedicated to individual student appointments. Our Emotional Support Team still has appointments for kids who request it, and advisories still meet every day. I am also lucky to have a parent, a distinguished Temple University professor, who has a tremendous amount of experience in online learning. He has been a great resource to Crefeld during this time.

Students are responding positively to Crefeld from Home. They quickly email me, the Dean of Students, and/or their advisor if they are struggling to get into a class. They are helping and looking out for one another.

While I am always proud of the Crefeld Community, what I have been watching over the last few weeks is different and encouraging. We are going to get through this, stronger, smarter, and ready to engage in more meaningful ways than before.