

Online learning results in very different outcomes

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While issues abound in public schools, one private school saw opportunity

By JULIANNE MOSHER

Some schools are noticing how they can benefit from a strictly online world.

That's what Joshua Crane, head of school at the Stony Brook School, mentioned when he talked about how the COVID-19 crisis impacted the private, college preparatory, boarding school on the North Shore.

"We saw public schools struggle with their online plans," he said. "And we really were able to have more students than we've ever had here before, between folks who are on campus, and folks who are dialing in remotely."

Crane said that, early in the pandemic, the school began planning immediately to figure a way forward. Since they are known as a boarding school with students enrolling from around the globe, they knew they had to implement a program that would keep students engaged and wanting to come back — even if it wasn't in person.

"We've got kids all over the world, many could not come back, but we were able to pivot and provide over the internet with distance learning, and that was really beneficial for folks," Crane said. "So, in any given classroom, we've got several people who are in-person, and then also people who are dialing in from all over the world into one classroom."

Some of those students are Zooming in from China, Korea, various countries in Europe, Vietnam and Saudi Arabia. Many would not have come back to the United States during the global COVID-19 crisis. Crane said that the school exceeded its



Joshua Crane, head of the Stony Brook School

enrollment this academic year because more than a dozen new students were able to join, thanks to remote learning.

And the Stony Brook School knew this is the way of the future. Crane said the school is implementing an entirely new program to accommodate the remote aspect of private education.

Stony Brook Global is a new program the school is putting the finishing touches on and "is going to be a purely online spin off for us," he said.

"That was kind of born out of this time, where we said, 'You know what, we're actually not bad at doing online education,'" Crane added. "It's something we had been thinking about, but this really accelerated our ambitions."

This year, the school has seven students who are entirely remote and will likely never physically come to campus. Crane said the goal is to offer Stony Brook Global to students to do pure online learning with their teachers.

Stony Brook Global is different than the current hybrid option they have.

"It's going to be their own program," Crane



Carol Melnick, attorney with Jaspan Schlesinger

said. "What we're going to do is we are creating basic content videos and there will be live teachers who will work with the content produced out of Stony Brook."

Stony Brook Global will consist of solely international students. "They are not going to have the interaction with our ground campus people," he said. "They'll be separate, they won't be dialing into our actual classrooms, but a lot of the content will come from our teachers here."

Crane said the tuition for the Global program will be more affordable, with a goal to reach "100 students in 100 countries." The school is currently pricing out the different options, but tuition is estimated to be the average of typical low-cost models and high-cost models at around \$16,000.

All of it came about because of the pandemic. "We had to innovate, and we had to think about how we can keep this business going because private schools, R&D businesses — we aren't a tuition-driven school, we don't have a super big endowment," he said. "So, it was just critical for us to keep the engine running, and this was a fruit of that."

The success at the school is contrasted by

other cases, where parents found themselves fighting school districts to put their kids back in schools — this was especially true for parents of children with disabilities.

Last year, a class-action lawsuit was brought by parents of students in New York City against Mayor Bill de Blasio. According to attorney Carol Melnick with Jaspan Schlesinger, the suit raised questions on forcing students to go remote when they require an individualized education program.

"Districts are required to provide a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities, and that their program comes in the form of an IEP," she said.

In March when students were sent to learn from home due to school closures, there was a challenge of parents saying their children's placement cannot be changed.

"In special education law, there is this doctrine of placement that you can't change a student with disabilities placement without parental agreement," Melnick said. "The parents were saying, 'We don't agree for our children to be home. They're not getting the education they're supposed to be getting.'"

Melnick said the court stated that a student's receipt of remote instruction was an authorized alternative mode of instruction delivery and did not constitute a change in the student's placement.

"That was big news for school districts because many of our school district clients are faced with this," she added. "Parents are very frustrated, especially with students with high needs, who initially were home, and with hybrid learning with its back and forth."

But while remote learning might be difficult for some, yet beneficial to others, Melnick said her clients within the school districts keep coming out stronger than before due to the pandemic.

"COVID has really forced them to look at how they educate students and how by organizing they can pull together and work together," she said.