

# Admin reveals behind the scenes of running school

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Despite the school's closure, faculty and staff are still working behind the scenes to make the transition to online school as efficient as possible and maintain the campus.

The decision to close the school until April 17 was not based on instructions from the U.K. government, but was instead decided by the administration. However, Head of School Robin Appleby said that the school tracks advice from the government.

"We have all sorts of channels that we use to track advice," she said. "Some of it is people we know within the government who can give us heads up on what's coming, what the thinking is."

Months before the school's closure, High School Principal Devan Ganeshanathan said that the Senior Leadership Team and the Academic Leadership Team had already started working on the Distance Learning Plan in February.

"The planning for distance learning really honestly started way back at the beginning of the coronavirus," he said. "At that point it was pretty unlikely ... Most people thought this was some kind of distant issue that would never come to our shores."



Illustration by Emily Forgash

Then, once the threat of school closing became inevitable, Appleby said that the leadership teams started establishing the logistics of the DLP.

"We've done a ton of work to really fill it out and try to make it align with the philosophy for teaching and learning that we already had in place at the school," she said.

Ganeshanathan said that the DLP evolved from an originally asynchronous model to a more synchronous one due to a variety of factors.

"We did want to make sure that we were focusing more specifically on making sure that there is some flexibility," he said.

Appleby agreed, and said that it is unrealistic and unnecessary to hold Zoom sessions for entire class periods.

"We don't think it's healthy for kids to sit and stare at a computer for four 80 minute blocks a day, so that's why it's a combination of synchronous and asynchronous," she said.

Appleby said that another aspect of distance learning that is still being developed is determining how testing will work.

"Obviously traditional testing ... won't be done. It's very difficult to do that in the same way, so we're going to get creative and find new ways going forward."

Zoom calls, however, aren't restricted to distance learning. Director of Operations Jim Heynderickx said that he has frequent Zoom meetings with the Operations Team and the Senior Leadership Team.

"We had a Senior Leadership Team [meeting] yesterday for an hour and a half with all 12 of us on Zoom together," he said. "To be honest, it's surprisingly effective given that none of us were on campus."

Ganeshanathan said that it seems as though a majority of the community is up to speed on how to use Zoom. However, he said that there are some drawbacks to using Zoom as a form of communication.

"[Zoom is] not nearly the same thing as being in person," he said. "You miss physical cues, body language, tone. It's very easy for people to tune out, so to speak."

Overall, though, Appleby said that Zoom helps the community maintain personal connections.

"Zoom works really well, and it does feel personal," she said. "People need that connection, so almost all of my Zoom meetings will start with five to 10 minutes

of people just checking in and saying 'hey, how are you doing? What are you doing?'"

Although most faculty members are working over Zoom, Heynderickx said that there are still people working on campus. However, he said they are trying to keep these numbers to a minimum.

"We have about four different groups of employees on campus who are absolutely essential to come to campus, even if it's completely empty," he said.

Security guards, two maintenance staff members per day, the accounts office staff and members of the operations team still work at the school during this period. In addition, the aquatics team goes into school twice a week to check on the pool.

From home, Heynderickx said that he has been reorganizing future construction projects with contractors due to social distancing policies.

"[Government policies are] causing us to delay some projects or rethink some projects we [were] planning to do either in the next few months or over the summer," he said.

Appleby said that another aspect that is being taken into consideration is how the school impacts the greater community.

"We're also thinking about our larger community," she said. "How do we fit into it? All of the community service that we are usually providing, if we can't provide that, how else can we help?"

In response to these questions, Appleby said that different classes are working to give back to the community.

"There are classes, for instance, that are doing things like writing letters to old age pensioners who they used to see on a regular basis," she said.

Also, Ganeshanathan said that Director of Student Life James Perry is working with student-run clubs to "create additional normalcy" and connections for students.

However, Ganeshanathan said that it's important to acknowledge that there's a limit to how normal and productive our lives can be from home.

"That's going to have a ceiling, so to speak," he said. "We're going to reach an asymptote ... as to how good this is going to be instructionally, interpersonally, everything."

Ultimately, Ganeshanathan said that the main factor being taken into consideration behind the scenes is the wellbeing of the community.

"The first and most important thing," he said, "is really people's health and wellness."