



COVID-19 results in cancellation of school year

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With the COVID-19 pandemic shutting house doors and limiting social interaction across the world, one phrase has become commonplace: this is the new normal. Uncertainty remains constant during this time, yet through a great deal of resilience, the South community has banded together to adapt to this “new normal.” From donations for local hospitals to the swift implementation of a new learning structure, South has proven that togetherness and adaptability are essential in times like these.

Beginning on March 31 and extending to the end of the school year, South has entered a new phase of education, E-Learning, due to the closure of all schools in Illinois. Per Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) guidelines, teachers assign from 45 to 90 minutes of schoolwork to complete for each class and days alternate between blue and gold with no E-Learning on Wednesdays. Also per ISBE guidelines, District 225 has decided to institute a “do no educational harm” principle in terms of grading, Superintendent Dr. Charles Johns said in a district-wide email.

“Students cannot earn a semester grade lower than the one they have [before E-Learning began],” Johns said. “The student’s baseline grade is the lowest grade that they will receive for the second semester as long as they actively participate during the remote learning period.”

Senior Max Ibarra said that although he initially thought that E-Learning would be tougher than normal school, he has found it to be essentially the same level of difficulty. Considering that his teachers continued to use the same online applications they used before E-Learning began, the transition was fairly easy, Ibarra said. He enjoys the fact that the E-Learning structure allows him to work at whatever pace he desires; however, he misses the social aspect of school, and finds it difficult for some of his classes to adapt.

“My most difficult classes have been my hands-on classes,” Ibarra said. “I took the Forensics course because of the interactive activities it offered. But because I don’t have any microscopes lying around my house, I can’t really learn firsthand like I had hoped to.”

Automotives Teacher Brad Klimkowski shares Ibarra’s sentiment; his courses are centered around physically interacting with automotive technology which E-Learning cannot accommodate. Although he is using this time of digital learning to teach the cognitive aspects of automotives, Klimkowski emphasized the need for students to physically practice the theoretical skills learned and gain the experience of trial and error.

“We can study theory all we want, but we need to practice our skills in order to improve and make ourselves, better, faster, and more efficient,” Klimkowski said. “This can’t be replaced in an E-Learning environment; we need the actual tools, the dirt and the grease, the rusty stuck bolts. We also need the trial and error, failure is a huge part of building a skill as well.”

With the majority of schools across the nation having shut down and a number closed for the rest of the academic year, the College Board has decided to change the format of Advanced Placement (AP) testing for the 2020 year.

Most exams will give one or two free-response questions in which students will have 45 minutes to complete them via online submission, an update sent by the College Board said.

Dayna Cottrell, AP Language and Composition teacher, is grateful that students still have the opportunity to take the tests that they’ve prepared all year for and trusts that, given the circumstances, the College Board is making the best decision for all students. Cottrell also mentioned that the switch to E-Learning has made her more aware of the importance of being in a classroom and having easy access to one-on-one conversations. While the new test format has altered her teaching plans, Cottrell emphasized that the classes are more than just AP test prep classes, and that the material learned is essential beyond high school.

“It’s been hard in terms of planning,” Cottrell said. “I’m just doing my best to maintain the integrity of the class, making sure we’re still doing what’s important for us, but also considering that we have this one unique type of writing we have to prepare for that the whole test rides on. It’s a delicate line.”

Senior Vanessa Vaisanen, a student enrolled in all AP classes, enjoys the fact that E-Learning allows her to prioritize work in a way that best suits her learning style. The independence of learning at home is not too different from her normal AP classes, Vaisanen said, in which she receives material and is expected to study it on her own. She has felt some anxiety regarding the unfamiliar nature of this year’s AP tests, but she feels that overall, E-Learning will serve to be a good learning opportunity for students and staff.

“Initially, I thought E-Learning would be a bust in the case that people wouldn’t participate or [it] wouldn’t be providing us with the same breadth of knowledge,” Vaisanen said. “Really, I think this will teach a lot of students how to take responsibility for their education because there are so many teachers supporting and accommodating us as much as they can.”

Both Cottrell and Klimkowski stressed the importance of patience and understanding for students and teachers during the transition to E-Learning. Klimkowski admitted that even after teaching at South for ten years, he felt like the first week of E-Learning was his first week teaching. Cottrell urges students to reach out to teachers, especially given the social-emotional turmoil of such drastic changes, and emphasized the necessity of compassion during this time.

“[I’m focusing on] teaching with grace,” Cottrell said. “[Teachers] understand that this is a very complex situation, especially for a teenager to be handling right now, so we’re doing our best to support students and letting students know we’re there for them.”

South has emphasized that throughout E-Learning, a number of resources will still be available to students.

Students can sign up for online conferences with teachers through the Titan Learning Center (TLC) for homework help, and librarians are available during school hours for research and citation help. District 225 is continuing to provide meals for students in need, regardless of income, throughout the duration of school closure. Meals can be picked up at the front of South on Mondays and Wednesdays between 7 a.m. and 12 p.m. This will continue for the remainder of the school year and possibly into summer. On average, 110 students are picking up meals between the Glenbrooks according to Kim Ptak, Director of Operations for district 225.

Despite further cancellation of events like the spring musical Cinderella, South is working to make the best of the situation and rally around the Glenview community.

The Student Council sent out an email recommending things for students to do during the quarantine, ranging from movie recommendations to service opportunities. Key Club members are taking part in a program called PandemicPals where participants write letters to senior citizens around Chicagoland to build connections during quarantine, Josie Sobeks, Key Club board member, said. Vaisanen’s AP Biology class is taking part in the program as well.

“It’s a way for our communities to reach out to [elderly people] in isolation who potentially could get really sick and let them know that everyone is doing their part to support them,” Vaisanen said. “Since isolation can get pretty lonely, we’ve come up with a way to communicate with those who can’t go out.”

The South community also banded around students whose athletic seasons, clubs and activities were cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic by lighting up the football stadium from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. on April 17. All 12 schools in the Central Suburban League participated in the event as a way to recognize students and show solidarity, Johns said.

As the uncertainty of how much longer the pandemic will continue and whether things will get back to normal, Ibarra focuses on what he can and cannot control. He realizes that optimism and adaptability are essential now more than ever.

“As the unknown continues to outweigh what we do know and doubt begins to cloud judgment, I don’t plan on wasting time pouting about what I can’t change,” Ibarra said. “I continue to focus on improving what I can change about myself as does my family. My optimism may be misplaced but it’s what we need in times like these.”

