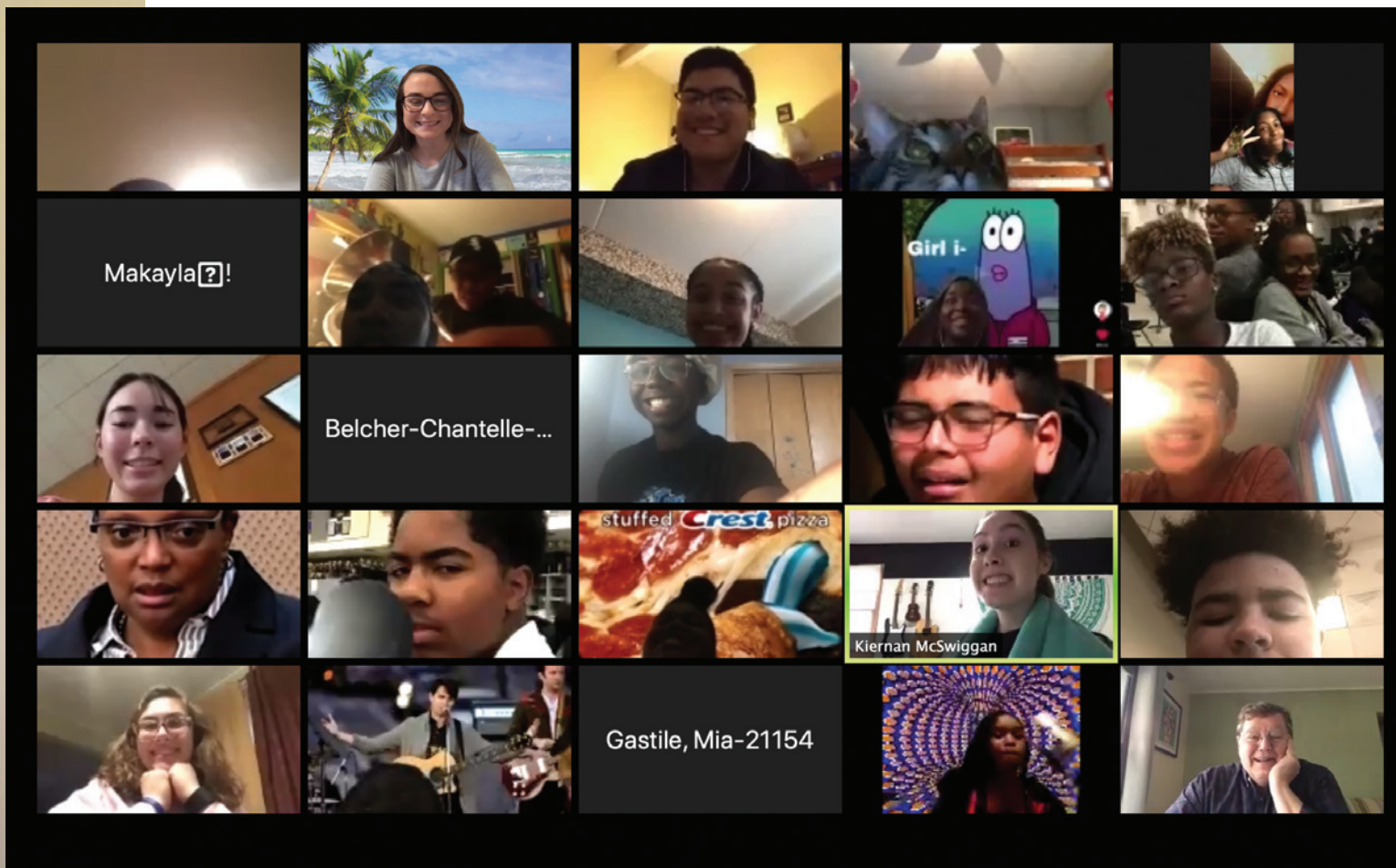


# Preparing, Adjusting and **MOVING FORWARD**

| Sean Scanlon |

**Marian Catholic  
High School's  
successful approach  
to eLearning**





### The preparation

Marian Catholic High School is a co-ed high school in Chicago Heights, Illinois, with an enrollment of just under 1,000 students. We have been 1:1 with iPads for six years. I have been at Marian Catholic for 19 years and in my current position for four years. Steve Tortorello is the first lay principal in the school's 60+ years; and we have worked very closely over the past six years preparing our faculty and students to make effective changes in how we utilize technology in the classroom. Most recently, we have spent hours discussing how to best address eLearning during this current pandemic.

As the pandemic spread, we quickly added a professional learning community (PLC) to discuss what tools and strategies teachers would need to effectively teach their students during an extended closure. One of the key aspects we addressed with our teachers was what formative assessments and virtual lessons would look like. Simply getting answers from students on a worksheet is not reliable feedback and is generally too low on Bloom's taxonomy to effectively let teachers know how well their students understood a lesson. We

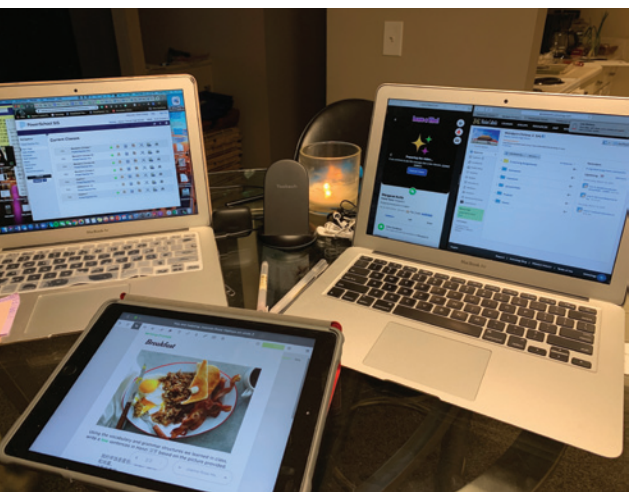
encouraged teachers to occasionally require students to use the screen recording option on their iPad to submit a video of them solving a problem as they explain the process. This would allow the teacher to see and hear if students truly understood. Students could use Flipgrid or other platform to submit these videos and teachers could use PearDeck to get live feedback during a presentation of new material.

Our teachers were already using Screencastify or Screencast-O-Matic to record lessons and post them for their students. Schoology discussion boards and Google Meet would prove vital in connecting with students. We didn't want to overwhelm our teachers with new tools, so this was our chance to remind them of tools and apps they already knew about, while giving them time to explore a little deeper. Overall, our teachers felt confident they could handle teaching online for a few weeks if necessary, and all the support materials they needed were stored in Schoology.

### Grade less, grade better

We felt it was important to maintain as much normalcy as possible for our students while the building was





(and remains) closed. We knew from our previous eLearning days that if there was no schedule and work was only being pushed to students, we wouldn't see the communication and feedback between students and teachers that is vital for our students' success. We decided to follow our regular schedule and take attendance each class period using a one-question Schoology quiz.

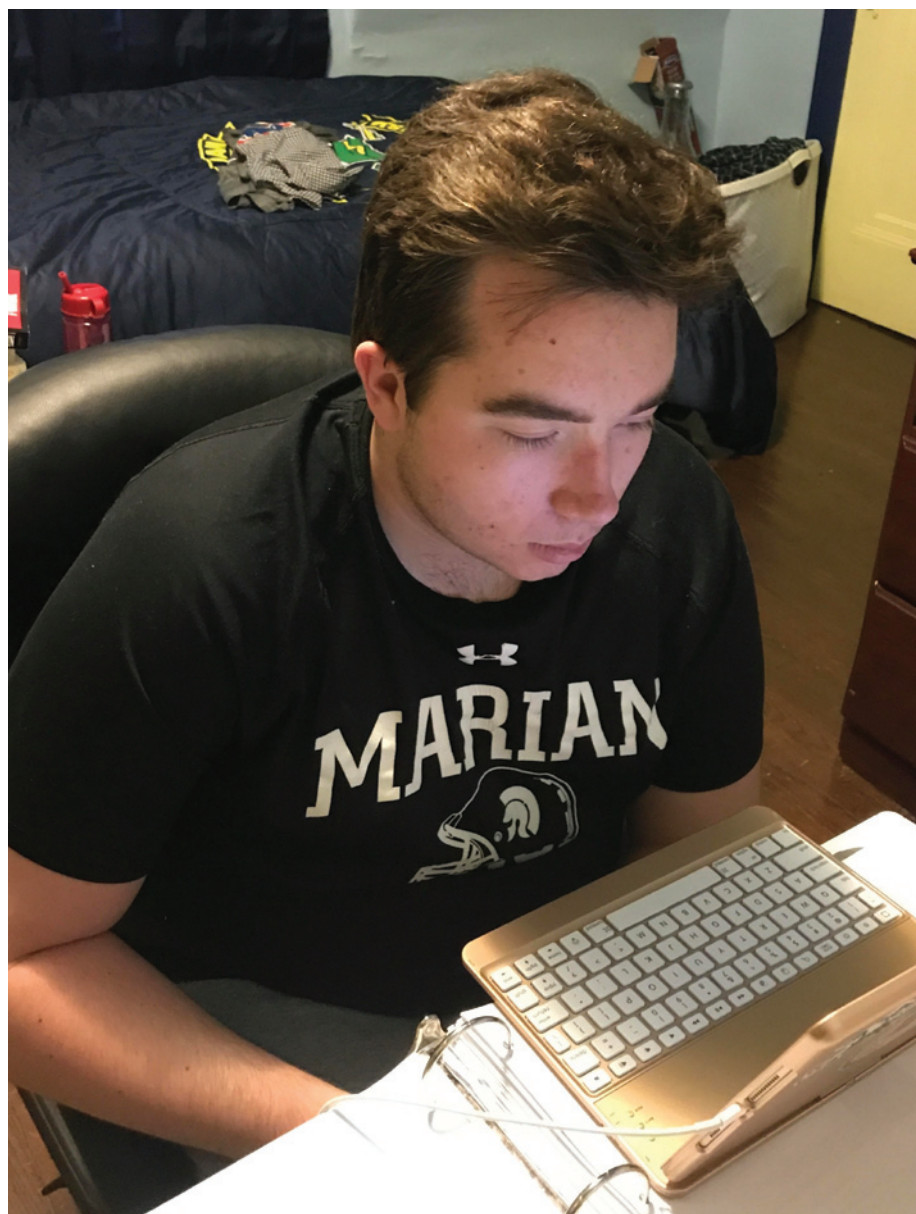
The teachers began transferring their plans from the physical



classrooms to their new online classrooms and used tools we had discussed earlier, along with a few more, like EdPuzzle and Zoom. Teachers soon realized this environment not only looked and felt different, it required a different approach that would be less taxing on them physically and mentally. The teachers who would normally be in their classrooms two or more hours after the final bell were now the ones awake at 2 AM writing new lesson plans and grading work from the day before.

We asked our teachers to focus on grading less and grading better. I hosted an online PLC and shared information with our teachers about utilizing higher order questions, alternative assessments and a more asynchronous approach. As teachers made this shift, we were in week three of eLearning and closing in on the most needed spring break of all time.

When we learned school would be closed for three more weeks, we knew we had to adjust our schedule if we expected teachers to continue giving the necessary feedback to their students, and everyone needed a break from screen time. Using our regular school day has proven effective in keeping students engaged in online classes, so our new schedule is four days a week, with classes on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Teachers now hold office hours on Wednesday for two hours, as scheduled by their departments. We





wanted a whole day when students can get the help they need and get away from the computer and classwork to relax, so there is no homework for students to complete on Wednesdays.

### Please, don't go back

As we discussed the effective changes our teachers had made — to how they present material, support their students and gather feedback — we realized the positive effects these changes could have on education in the future. Principal Tortorello reminded me of a quote from Rahm Emanuel: “Never allow a crisis to go to waste. Start planning for the future.”

Teachers around the country have recently made changes to their physical classrooms and the pedagogy they use, while others maintain a classroom that looks and feels like it did 20 years ago. My hope is that administrators and



teachers around the country will reflect on what we did effectively and ineffectively during this time, and realize why we need to make changes to education.

If there was ever a time to make

major changes to how we “do school,” it is now. We have witnessed firsthand the importance of having strong relationships with our students and high-quality, formative feedback and how a combination of better pedagogy and the right technology tools can help us more effectively close learning gaps for our students.

When you go back in the fall, please don't go “back.” Please, use this experience to move forward. Continue using tools we may have been forced to use while closed and focus on what we missed most, our students, to build more effective pedagogy and create a more welcoming classroom culture for our students.

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