

Pre-School Struggle with Online Learning

BY: Brandon Sapienza

As schools across the country shutter their doors amidst the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), most of the now closed institutions have turned to an online learning format to continue classes for students of all ages ranging from elementary school to colleges. However, left out of consideration of how they will press on are among the youngest school age children that have attended pre-school since September.

Within a matter of days since COVID-19 began to spread quickly in New York City, schools, businesses and daily life did not have enough time to prepare for inevitable uncertainty that would follow. For a school though faced with various challenges under normal circumstances including staff shortages and tight budgets, the sudden closure of the schools caught many off guard.

“We were kind of left out to dry when they closed the school,” said Caroline Luna, a Universal Pre-School teacher at the William O’ Connor Midwood School. “No one could have ever expected something like this to happen, and unfortunately we don’t have the resources to do virtual learning.”

Internet accounts for some teachers were not even set up and employees in the IT department still remain unable to keep up with the demand of colleagues to help set up the necessary tools required for working from home.



“My co-teacher has been working at this school for over 30 years, and she has not had an email or anything set up until a few days ago and it still doesn’t work,” Luna said. “Since we work together as a team, it makes both of our jobs harder and that’s unfair to the students.”

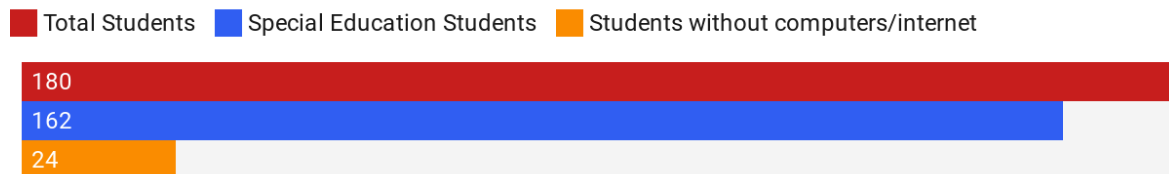
The William O’ Connor Midwood School consists of only pre-school students with many of them being placed in classrooms for students with special needs and disabilities. “Around 90 percent of our classrooms are special education classrooms only,” explained principal Cindy Seiden. “We know we’ve posed a great challenge to teachers, students, and families alike to get those dependent students the help they need.”

The small pre-school welcomes 180 students each day during normal operations, but many of these students come from impoverished backgrounds and broken homes, stemming from families who came to the United States illegally within the past number of years.

“These families are unfortunately cash-strapped and live in crowded apartments and don’t have the finances to transition to online learning. They don’t have the resources to continue any possible virtual learning.”

William O' Connor Midwood Online Learning Demographics

Breakdown of the issues teachers at William O' Connor Midwood face in the transition to virtual learning



Data for the 2019-2020 school year

Chart: By: Brandon Sapienza • Created with Datawrapper

According to many teachers in the school who did not want to go on the record out of fear of retaliation, there are a great deal of students who have been unable to access any online learning. One teacher said, “These students will be greatly behind the curve when they start Kindergarten, in September hopefully.

Teachers have also been met with a challenge of what to teach those students who can access any online learning environment.

“In our classroom, lots of is hands on learning. Much of a typical day consists of doing things like arts and crafts, lending library and of course free play with blocks and things like that,” Luna said. “Since that’s most of our day, it’s hard to transition kids who



are used to being in a classroom to doing activities that might not be as fun online instead.”

Teachers have also made it priority to try and ease the tensions that might be building up in these young children. The swift changes that have impacted adults across the country have also impacted the youngest among us as confusion and concern continues to build up in students.

“I’ve spoken to parents often during this time and they tell me that their kids are scared. Some are asking when they will see their teachers again,” said Marina Cora, a teaching assistant at the William O’Connor Midwood School. “So what we’ve done is made a great deal of the virtual learning be centered around practicing good hygiene and we let parents explain what’s going on in ways they feel comfortable.”

The William O’ Connor Midwood School is certainly not the only school in New York City, or the nation experiencing hardship during these uncertain times. But teachers continue to find unrest in not knowing what steps are next that will deliver the best quality education to their students from afar.

“All I can say is that we’re doing the best we possibly can,” Luna said. “I speak for my whole team when I say we all dearly miss our students, and I truly hope we can get to see all of them before the school year ends in June.”