

Fall 2020 | Issue 10

CONTINUUM

TOTINO-GRACE HIGH SCHOOL

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

DURING A TIME OF UNPREDICTABLE CIRCUMSTANCES



From the **President's Desk**

The spring semester of the 2019-2020 school year was unlike any other in our institution's history. We faced incredible and unprecedented challenges for our community. When Totino-Grace High School broke for spring break in March, we did not anticipate the extent of the global health emergency that quickly ensued. Our pivot to distance learning focused on synchronized teaching and supporting students with their emotional, faith formation, and physical needs. In essence, we wanted to take care of our students and that's what we did.

One mother wrote: "I quickly learned how invested TG teachers are. I've often stood outside my son's room and witnessed classroom interaction taking place. I've heard teachers end classes by saying, 'Ok, that's it for today, anyone need anything else I can help with? Just remember, I love you all.'" Another parent noted, "I've heard teachers calling on students to make sure that they were engaged. I never knew how collaborative virtual learning could be until I saw the creativity of my kids' teachers." A third commented, "TG teachers didn't just check the boxes, dumb things down, and coast to the end of the year. Students were challenged; they were held accountable, and they learned."

Feedback from recent student and parent surveys indicated that TG accomplished distance learning more successfully than other area high schools, reporting great satisfaction in how our faculty implemented our virtual academic program. Perhaps most impressive, 99.4% of parents who responded to the survey indicated that they would recommend TG to their network of family, friends, and colleagues for their children to attend. This tells us that our value proposition held up during such an extraordinary time in education.

The end of the academic year was marked by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis on Memorial Day. Peaceful protests were overshadowed by subsequent rioting. As Pope Francis recently stated, "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life." We as a society have work to do as we move forward. For Totino-Grace, in particular, we must help our students model the Catholic values of respect and justice as they make their mark in the world.

Little did we know that Totino-Grace would confront such impactful events this past year. In this issue of *The Continuum*, our focus is on how we increased our value proposition by successfully implementing our synchronized learning program as well as enhanced planning to ensure that we are understanding, uncovering, and overcoming our biases so we become a more attentive school community. Together, we can build a more just world for all people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig W. Junker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Craig" and last name "Junker" clearly legible.

Dr. Craig W. Junker
President

Totino-Grace High School Exceeds Expectations

During a Time of Unpredictable Circumstances

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic impact during the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year and to comply with the governor's distance learning orders, Totino-Grace moved to online classes beginning the week of March 23 and throughout the remainder of the school year. All spring athletic, performing arts, and activities seasons were canceled across the state. Based on survey feedback from students, parents, and faculty, Totino-Grace exceeded expectations with academic standards, a balance of rigor and reality, consistent care for students, and community opportunities. This issue's feature highlights the challenges and achievements of a semester like no other in our school's history. To learn more, and for videos, images, and news stories, visit www.totinograce.org/tgeaglesonline.



Totino-Grace teachers maintained high expectations for my child's (children's) learning during the school's remote learning program.

97.7%
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE



My child was (children were) challenged academically during Totino-Grace's remote learning program.

93.1%
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

“TG approached remote learning with a continued commitment to quality education. Compared to public school experiences I've heard about I am even more convinced that TG is worth every tuition dollar. THANK YOU!”

Current Parent



The Impact of our Mission and the Inspiration of our Founders

Each summer, Totino-Grace Student Ministers – juniors and seniors committed to being faith leaders in our school community – select a theme for the coming school year based on the lives of one of our founders. The 2019-2020 school year theme is focused on the life of Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger, foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Our school year ministry theme for 2019-2020 was Together We Are, inspired by Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger who said, “Unity alone makes us strong within and without; unity makes us indestructible. Unity lightens the hardships of our vocation; unity makes us invincible.” Little did we know how significant the theme would be in guiding how we responded to the uncertainties and challenges we faced this spring. The strength of our relationships and community allowed us to successfully navigate an unparalleled time in our school's history.



My child (children) felt engaged with teachers during Totino-Grace's remote learning program.

94.2%

STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

“I think that the way TG did the online school experience was very successful and more efficient than most schools. I really enjoyed the way classmates and teachers interacted with me.”

Current Student

My child(children) felt cared about, supported, and encouraged by TG teachers and staff during Totino-Grace's remote learning program.

97.1%

STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

In comparison with what you've heard and seen about other high schools' distance learning programs, how satisfied are you with Totino-Grace's remote learning program?

94.8%

STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

Academic Standards

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, Totino-Grace implemented online school days beginning March 25. The 1:1 school laptop program, with each TG student issued a MacBook Air laptop for school and home learning during the academic year, has been in place since 2013. Online school days for weather-related closures served as our only preview to a virtual classroom experience until the spring of 2020. Teachers and students utilized consistent academic platforms and various software programs to support unique classroom and curriculum needs to meet their academic goals. We are pleased that the average classroom attendance record throughout our distance learning program was consistent at 99%.



Cheri Broadhead, *Principal*

As a community, we are committed to developing innovative, resilient, and empathic graduates. Our teachers and staff demonstrated those skills as we quickly moved to online school in March. We relied on collaboration, creativity, resilience, and some real grit to be successful in this environment. While I believe online school is not what is best for most high school students, I do believe our teachers excelled and real learning took place.

We prepared for the long haul with staff members gathering necessary school supplies and arranging pickups so that students had what they needed at home without having to enter our building. Teachers delivered supplies to students' houses so that they could complete projects at home.

Our technology department prepared and provided teachers with an extensive resource list of online teaching tools, software, equipment, and ideas to modify curriculum to a distance learning environment. They fixed screens, cameras, and microphones on a moment's notice so that students could be fully present and participate in daily live classes.

Teachers hosted office hours late into the evening so that students could receive help outside of daily school hours and other home commitments. They invited guest speakers and presenters from across the globe to educate and interact with students online. Experiments were conducted live in teachers' homes so that students could virtually experience their labs in real time. Counselors and assistants made personal phone calls to check in on students, account for absences, and communicate on their behalf if technology issues arose.

The list could go on and on.

Through perseverance and a commitment to each other, we all survived, and I'd dare to say, we thrived in an educational environment like no other in our history. I'm proud of our students, our staff, and our parents for supporting our educational efforts during the spring of 2020. It's a year we will never forget and hopefully, we have all grown stronger, more patient, and willing to meet challenges head-on with determination when we know we are in it together.

I had enough access
to my teachers for
additional support.

83.1%
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE



TG PARENT/GUARDIAN DISTANCE LEARNING RATING

Please rate your overall
satisfaction with Totino-Grace's
remote learning program:

96.5%
EXTREMELY SATISFIED/SATISFIED

I found ways through classes
and school opportunities
to stay connected
and supported socially

63.9%
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

The help I received
from the TG Counseling
Staff met my needs

76%
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE

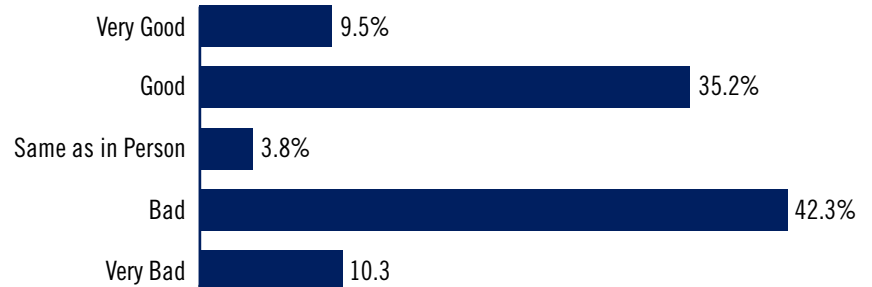
The help I received from
the TG Administration
met my needs

74%
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE



The Minnesota Department of Education's Fall Planning Survey received responses from more than 130,000 families from across the state. The survey included questions about parents'/guardians' spring 2020 distance learning experience.

The department published results that indicated more parents/guardians reported having a negative experience than a positive experience during the distance learning program.



When asked what experience went well during spring 2020 distance learning, the following response rates from the Minnesota Department of Education survey show that in comparison, TG exceeded expectations of both parents/guardians and students.

GOOD COMMUNICATION FROM TEACHERS

Number of Responses

Percent who indicated the experience went well during distance learning

81,304

60.6%

STUDENTS RECEIVED MORE ONE-ON-ONE ATTENTION

Number of Responses

Percent who indicated the experience went well during distance learning

16,651

12.4%

EASY TO UNDERSTAND LESSONS

Number of Responses

Percent who indicated the experience went well during distance learning

44,499

33.2%

STUDENTS FELT EMPOWERED TO LEARN ON THEIR OWN

Number of Responses

Percent who indicated the experience went well during distance learning

27,611

20.6%

More information and full results of the **Informal Survey of Minnesota Families on Experiences with Distance Learning** can be found on the Minnesota Department of Education website.

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/publicEng/>

A Balance of Rigor and Reality

For an optimal distance learning program for both teachers and students, our daily schedule was modified. Four 55 minute live virtual classes were held each day and followed a two day rotation. Virtual classes included a mix of live instruction, Google Hangouts for live interaction, and independent and small group work. Each teacher offered live, daily office hours. Totino-Grace's online learning format was reflective of a collegiate model, blending personal academic responsibility with supportive scaffolding for high school learners.



Dan Vandermyde, Assistant Principal

When we thought we might be online for a week after spring break, we thought we would just continue with our regular daily academic schedule. As we quickly recognized that it was likely going to be for a longer period of time, we realized a need to alter the schedule. Asking students and teachers to be in front of a computer for seven to eight hours just wouldn't work, not to mention the time and energy it would take our teachers and students to adjust to this new model for learning and teacher-to-student interactions and engagement. As a result, we came up with a Day A and Day B rotation with Fridays dedicated as student work days and for teachers to meet, plan, and create. Even with that adjustment, I think we recognized that the amount of work outside of "class time" had to be focused and limited. Knowing there was less available time in this schedule — both in class and out of class — teachers had to focus their curriculum on the most important content and objectives that needed to be covered as well as the importance of continued engagement with the students on a personal level, knowing the difficulty they were facing with being isolated at home.

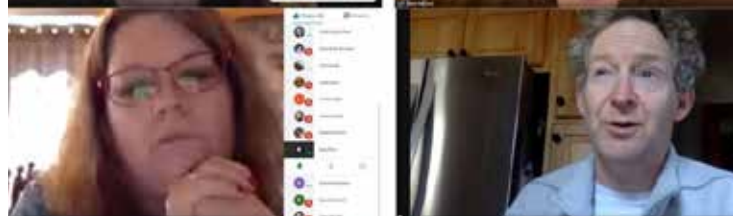
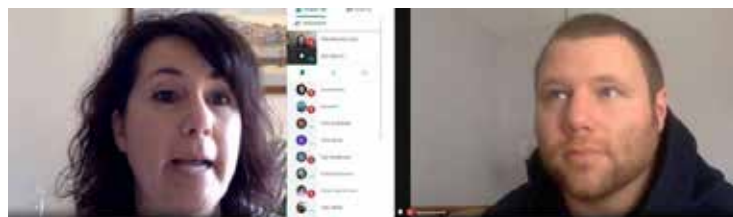
I think our faculty was amazing. I don't think most people understand the amount of work there was on the part of our teachers to adjust their curriculum to an online learning model with relatively short notice. It would be one thing if we simply had teachers post assignments or record video lectures

for students to watch, but knowing the importance of continuing the personal relationships with their students — as well as maintaining academic rigor and continuing the learning objectives — we asked our teachers to be live with the students at least half of each class. Our teachers found a good balance of synchronous time together as a class and asynchronous time for student work. Also, having all teachers available during office hours each day gave students the ability to connect individually as needed.

Our student attendance was nearly perfect and, given the circumstances, engagement was really good. Naturally, we were not able to do everything we would have been able to do during a typical school year, but compared to all we have heard from people's experiences at other schools, we did outstanding as a school community. I also think we are a more skilled school community now — both from a faculty and a student perspective. Our teachers are more prepared for any future distance learning scenarios, and have also gained some strategies, techniques, and comfort with tools that will undoubtedly be incorporated into a regular in-person learning scenario. I also think our students gained some skills in taking more ownership over their academic learning and engagement, and likely gained an appreciation for being present in school and in person with their classmates and their teachers.

"I feel actually more engaged because during office hours, teachers will really take the time to focus on each individual student and I feel each teacher is working very hard to make sure we are learning material well and it is understood."

Current Student



“At TG we have amazing teachers whose connections with students are needed now more than ever. My daughter’s teachers provide routine and personal check-ins to help provide some normalcy in a sea of uncertainty, address the kids’ spiritual and social needs, keep things real, yet fun, and lead awesome discussions that elicit both laughter and tears. Even her counselor has gone out of his way to work with my daughter and her teachers. He is a gift and blessing to our family.”

Current Parent



Consistent Care for Students

In order to aid in navigating uncharted academic and social experiences, our School Counseling Department shared online learning and self-care resources with members of our community. Their team also provided resources for families to best prepare for post-secondary exploration and preparation, including virtual meetings in place of scheduled in-person connections to discuss options and opportunities. In addition, the Student Life Office connected with students and parents to address academic challenges and attendance concerns and to support social and emotional adjustments of students throughout our distance learning program.



Craig Junker, *President*

Our teachers interacted with students in real time, daily. Teachers held office hours, daily. There were opportunities for community prayer, daily. Counselors were available to provide both personal, college, and career counseling, daily. Attendance remained strong, which showcased our students' commitment to academic progress and told us how much they need their teachers and one another. Totino-Grace staff worked hard to be present to our students beyond the classroom. As a Catholic Lasallian school, our first commitment is

that we belong to Christ and one another. We had — and continue to have — a job to do: to partner with parents to educate kids into young adults of integrity, hope, perseverance, and faith. We know who we are at Totino-Grace and what we are about. Really, what it comes down to is relationships and a shared commitment to our mission. Although we faced numerous challenges, I am proud of what we accomplished during our distance learning program.

Based on your overall experience with Totino-Grace (not just our remote learning program), would you recommend TG to your network of friends, family and colleagues for their children to attend?

99%

SAY YES

“As a teacher during this time of “quaranteaching,” I find myself trying to balance content with personal connection, reading journal articles to make me a better teacher, and fighting screen fatigue...In other words, teaching online is more than just posting an assignment and taking the rest of the day off. It is an all-in venture. It is rewarding and exhausting. I appreciate the work of our school leaders for keeping the ship afloat in these rough waters. Thank you for recognizing that engagement issues and burnout are real and for providing us with an online platform and schedule that is getting the job done. I am grateful for the work of many of my colleagues and our administrators.”

Totino-Grace Teacher



Traci Pastoors Bennington '08, *Campus Minister*

It goes without saying that the coronavirus outbreak radically altered our days and brought a lot of emotions to the surface: at times it was fear, anger, anxiety, and uncertainty while other moments may have brought joy, happiness, trust, and a feeling of community. We experienced a full spectrum of hot and cold emotions and truly, it was a challenging time for all.

We entered into a new time and space, a space that — for the most part — was unfamiliar to us

and one in which we feel as though we did not have much control. However, in the Campus Ministry Office, we believed that something we could control is how we respond to these emotions. We responded by continuing to provide our students, faculty, and staff with the space and resources to commit to, turn to, or seek faith, spirituality, and community during these challenging times. This included several daily, weekly, and one-time opportunities for our students.

Community Opportunities

As a school known for personal connections and our vibrant community, providing meaningful remote experiences for students during our distance learning program was a priority. Totino-Grace student life leaders, coaches, moderators, and music directors put forth significant effort into modifying traditional opportunities and creating new initiatives for Eagles to connect and share memorable moments with their classmates, teammates, and peers.



This really moved me because there are so many people who don't have what I have: the ability to go on long runs, a supportive family to play board games with, or a campus ministry team to hang out with. I know what it's like to receive kindness during a hard time, and I wanted people to feel that love.

-Anastasia Setter,
Class of 2020

Love,
Totino-Grace



“The community is absolutely amazing and everyone at TG is so committed to keeping the students engaged on a daily basis. Teachers are going above and beyond in helping students in every way they can by adding office hours at all hours of the day and night in addition to teaching daily classes.”

Current Parent

“I am most passionate about the faith formation piece. I personally think that the Campus Ministry Department did the best out of anyone to continue to unite TG.”

Current Student



Tim Hoffman,
*Director of Instrumental Music
and Assistant Activities Director*

During remote learning, all co-curriculars came to a halt. Most winter activities had completed most, if not all, of their seasons. Both instrumental and vocal music continued their work in music instruction as well as virtual performance

preparation with students working remotely on ensemble pieces, solo literature, music theory, and composition. Both departments released virtual concerts at the beginning of June, showcasing the work of the students during remote learning.



Mike Smith, Activities and Transportation Director

Our spring coaches met weekly to share ideas, discuss what was going well, and challenges they faced. They were able to really put in effort to make sure that their athletes felt a connection to TG and to their programs. For never having done anything like this before — and never getting any lead time to prepare — this group of coaches did an awesome job!



“Thank you to all the staff at TG! This has been a very tough time, however I feel that it has been handled as well as it possibly could be. I am so very grateful right now that my student is at Totino-Grace. This has really hit home the value of a Catholic Education, and the community that is Totino-Grace.”

Current Parent

Celebrating the Class of 2020

We know the impact of the stay-at-home order was especially difficult for this year's seniors as they missed out on experiences and traditions with classmates during their final year of high school. To recognize and celebrate the class of 2020, Totino-Grace faculty and staff developed a number of unique recognition and celebration opportunities. Visit www.totinograce.org/tg2020 for news, images, and video highlighting the class of 2020. Once an Eagle, Always an Eagle!



Drive through celebration



Recognition billboard



Eagle families celebrate decision day



Yard signs



Outdoor graduation



Top photo: graduation Bottom photo: Baccalaureate Mass

Virtual Admissions Opportunities

Welcoming prospective families on campus is the best way to showcase our community and the transformative opportunities available to our students. Throughout the duration of distance learning, the Totino-Grace Admissions Office offered virtual tours and meetings with interested families and hosted virtual open house events on April 27 and June 22. Administrators, teachers, coaches, and moderators recorded video segments for Future Eagle families to learn more about our academic and co-curricular programs.



“This was an unprecedented time for TG teachers and I feel they all did an exceptional job trying to prepare for something that they had no idea was going to work. I loved the structure. Classes everyday. Routine. Students need that.”

Current Parent

“I’m so very proud as an alum and a parent to see what continues to happen at that school amid so much uncertainty. Every single department is engaged in the effort and working toward the same goal. It’s clear to me that it’s been all hands on deck since this began. The teachers have been amazing — and we get to see that daily on social media. Today I listened to the music the kids did for “Music Monday” and sent it on to neighbors and friends as an example of the really creative things going on at TG (plus it’s positive news to share versus negative). I watched the video Friday of Mr. Ferkinhoff and how he approaches online learning — still connecting with the kids as best he can. Wellness Wednesday was fun to see...so many things. My kids tell me what their friends at north metro high schools are doing — it is NOTHING like what is going on at TG; we don’t just send emails and links...our teachers are ENGAGED. It brings tears to my eyes to see it when I watch the posts each day of the energy and commitment that’s evident with the staff. I’m so proud to be a part of this community!”

Current Parent

TOTINO-GRACE WILL BEGIN THE 2020-2021 ACADEMIC YEAR WITH AN **IN-PERSON FLEXIBLE HYBRID MODEL**

Classes will take place on campus and in-person with safety protocols in place, including physical distancing when possible and limiting the number of students permitted in a classroom. A distance learning option is available for students with extenuating health circumstances and those who need to self-quarantine at any point during the school year.

We invite you to learn more about our fall 2020 return to campus plan at www.totinograce.org/2020-2021.