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## Tech delivery enables Grand Island students to learn from home

**BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI**  
Contributor

When Max Pikula became a principal for the first time in his 20-year career in the Grand Island School District six months ago, he never envisioned doing what is required today with his faculty at Huth Road Elementary.

As a result of schools being closed since March 17 – until at least the end of April – school systems throughout New York state have begun distance learning to keep students engaged with their teachers and fellow students while being mandated to remain at home because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two week ago, Grand Island Central School District Superintendent Brian Graham, Ed.D., worked closely with Pikula, William Kaegebein Elementary Principal Mary Haggerty, and district Transportation Supervisor Theresa Alizadeh on the delivery of Google Chromebooks to the homes of the third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students at both schools.

“I am so thankful to our amazing staff, faculty, supervisors and administrators for working together on the delivery of these Chromebooks. Students from grades 3 through 12 are now able to use their school district mobile device at home, allowing them to communicate, interact and participate in a continuity of learning during this unprecedented school closure,” Graham said.

The district plans to soon distribute iPads to second-grade students.

Pikula said the Chromebooks give his teachers the opportunity to access the Google Classroom platform, which the students are already familiar with.

“This platform is giving us the ability to take the physical classroom in the school building and make something equivalent in the real world with students who now are at home,” Pikula explained via



Clockwise: Huth Road Principal Max Pikula transporting Chromebooks to a bus for delivery to students • Jessica Brown, left, and Amy McMann load Chromebooks into a Grand Island School District bus. • Teacher Margaret Kowalik delivering Chromebooks to Kailyn Smith’s home. Kailyn’s mom, Kim, is next to her (in the doorway).



a phone interview. “The teachers in our district now have an ability to communicate and teach through a variety of ways, thanks to this technology.”

Pikula spent his first 16 years in the district teaching special education at Kaegebein before becoming a middle school assistant principal and eventually taking this job last summer. He said his experience at Kaegebein had him working with many of the teachers on his faculty, so that narrowed the learning curve for him.

“We have a great team here and we are communicating regularly about ways to better communicate and build programs for instructing our students,” Pikula said.

The distance learning his teachers follow does not require students to be in front of their computers all day. Rather, teachers invite students to a “Google Hangout” at various times of the day to outline the programs they will follow.

Pikula said the administration’s next challenge will be to review

state guidelines and determine the next step in providing a distance learning program. Another challenge has been getting parents accustomed to this new way of educating their children, but he has been encouraged by their support.


Kailyn Smith, a Huth Road fifth-grade student, said she was excited to receive her Chromebook from Margaret Kowalik during the deliveries.

“I am happy I can now do my science, math, reading and social studies, but I am not happy I cannot be with my teachers and friends in our classroom. I Face-time and text them, but it just isn’t the same,” Kailyn explained from a distance as she picked up the book from her front steps.

“I will be really sad if we miss out on our fifth-grade Moving Up Day,” she noted.

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