




CASE STUDY

THE ULTIMATE TECH TEAM AND ONE SYSTEM FOR ALL: WESLEYAN CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OPTIMIZES DISTANCE LEARNING FOR THE WHOLE SCHOOL





Wesleyan Christian Academy is a private, Christian-based college preparatory school located in the heart of North Carolina. Founded in 1971, it's a place where students engage daily in an academic curriculum in which God's Word is woven into each subject, activity, and experience. They have 1,200 students enrolled on the 28-acre campus and offer programs for early education, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school, as well as an Enrichment program for students with diagnosed learning disabilities.

Tracy Crawford, FACTS' K12 customer relationship manager spoke to Wesleyan Christian Academy's Richard Bradley, IT director, and Angel Taylor, director of admissions.

► **Tracy:** Thank you so much for speaking with me today! I know it's been a long, challenging several months for schools as they closed out their final semester of school. Can you share what Wesleyan's transition to distance learning was like?

► **Angel:** It was kind of divine intervention. About five years ago we hired a new technology teacher, Katlin Hockaday. She said, "Why aren't we using Google Classroom? Let's move to Google Classroom." So, she moved all our students to Google Classroom. Meanwhile, the faculty and staff were saying, "Google what?"

Richard Bradley, our IT director, and Jonathan Ruble, our IT coordinator, came to Wesleyan about the same time as Katlin. Under the direction of a couple of our principals, they started implementing big and small changes to the technology in our classrooms, like adding FACTS, for example. We hired another technology teacher, Dr. Nate Jarrett. He, along with Richard, Jonathon, and Katlin started to implement more and more technology throughout the school and started doing training sessions for our teachers.

That team had planned to have two in-service trainings on integrating technology into the classroom this past March 13 and 14. We dismissed school on Wednesday, March 12, and then the bottom fell out. We still held those trainings, and instead of just thinking, "This is a good idea for you to implement," the tone was, "We really need you to pay attention to this."

The following Saturday we made the decision to move fully to a distance learning platform. We had our technology instructors plus our IT staff, and like I said, it really was divine intervention that we were set up with such a quality team to help us fully make the transition to Google Classroom across all grade levels. We also implemented asynchronous and synchronous teaching using Loom. We even implemented this in our Early Education Center, which includes six-week-old babies to PK4.

By not having school open during our in-service training on March 13 and 14, we realized students had not been able to take their books home. Now the challenge was to work on how to distribute books and get information materials out to families. On March 16, our division principals and teachers disseminated emails to parents and students with instructions regarding plans and preparations for online learning, including book and material pick-up times. We created an assembly line, almost.

► **Tracy:** What did your COVID-19 communication plan look like? Did you have a formal plan or put one together?

► **Richard:** Our principals came together and created a formal, tiered Response Plan that included four levels of response. The purpose of this was to communicate our intent to exercise care and protect students, faculty, staff, volunteers, and parents due to COVID-19. The goal was to administer the policy with a mindset of love and wisdom over fear. It clearly laid out the action to be taken with each level of alertness and we posted it on our COVID-19 [Distance Learning website page](#). We will continue to use this for the 2020-2021 school year, but we will probably tweak it some.

► **Tracy:** You have a huge range of grade levels and a large student body. What does your technology stack look like for remote learning and how are you using the tools within your school or within certain grade levels?

► **Richard:** We're using FACTS SIS, Google Classroom, Google Classroom integration with FACTS SIS, Google Meet, and Loom.

We've learned from this situation. It's helped our administration see areas of opportunity. We've had technology administered differently in each department: elementary, middle school, high school. Some were using Zoom, some were using Google Meet, and some were using pre-recorded stuff. Some teachers used Google Classroom and some were using FACTS SIS in different ways. We knew it was going to be crazy because of the speed at which everything rolled out, but in a way, the quick entry into distance learning did help us see what worked best.

Now our focus is pushing for universal best practices. We want to say, "Here's how we do it at our school." Different tools reach elementary students better than high school students. But we also need to know what the safest tool is and what the easiest platform is for our families to use while managing a job and trying to help facilitate learning without worrying about multiple logins as well. We gravitated more toward Google Meet.

Loom was a tremendous opportunity for us. We received a lifetime membership because of the virus, so that is why we pushed Loom and we will use that from here on out. Our Principals used Loom to do weekly meetings.

We have been investigating Clever as an SSO option to get everyone in one portal that helps them log into everything.

Our reason for moving to FACTS was to get all families onto one system too. That was a major change for us because we were in five different systems before. It helped us and our families tremendously.

► **Tracy:** How did FACTS assist you in making the transition to distance learning?

► **Richard:** We were already using the Google Classroom integration. We were not able to roll it out completely to the entire school once it was set up because a lot of teachers had already set up their Google Classrooms before we added the integration. The way they had created their classrooms did not match our SIS/integration setup. This summer will be the full, integrated rollout across the school.

We did have a lot of our team teachers using the integration and they loved it. We had two or three tech workshops in March about our Google Classroom integration with FACTS SIS and how great it is. We offered a beginner, intermediate, and advanced level on Google Classroom and FACTS SIS integration. When the teachers were able to showcase what they had been learning throughout the year, it really helped everyone to see the big picture. They love being able to communicate to every family member through Google Classroom in addition to using FACTS SIS communication, gradebook, and reports.

We changed up a lot of our grading during this time. Kindergarten and first grade grading became more of a narrative. We put more comments as opposed to numerical grades. We only graded three core subjects in elementary: reading, language, and math. This came out of a survey from parents that we needed to back off assessments. We said, "Let's focus on these core things."

We still provided the electives. Our PE and art teachers did a great job, but it was not anything they were required to do. It was, "Hey, if you have time, do it as a family," to really bring that family relationship into it. Families would share videos back to our school Facebook page. Our team has done a great job showing how the school was communicating with households and our electives helped do that.

► **Tracy:** You mentioned a parent survey. What were some of the themes you heard from parents as you pivoted to distance learning and how did you roll out that survey?

► **Richard:** Prior to our Easter break, our head of school, Dr. Rob Brown, [shared a video](#) with our families to explain that we wanted to hear from them. We then developed two surveys, one for parents and one for students. We asked them to fill out the surveys by Monday, April 6. Our administrative team reviewed the responses the following week to identify modifications we needed to make to our online learning format.

We had an overwhelming response from parents. Parents understood the work that teachers were putting in to make the distance learning format work. My daughter's first grade teacher would send us messages at midnight and 1 AM because that is when everything was quiet in her house and she was able to work. She used Loom to do her Bible stories and taught using it. Parents were thankful for the teachers' response. We also had teachers learning to adapt quickly. If something wasn't working, they would quickly adjust. Teachers would share best practices about what was working well for them. Team teachers from each grade level also pulled together to help make lighter work for everyone.

► **Angel:** Within a day of making the announcement of moving to a full distance learning model, we got our first email asking, "What are you going to do about this and do I get some tuition money back?"

It's a tough situation, but I responded with, "Thank you. Please give us time to figure this out. We do not plan on discounting tuition. We are still providing a service. We want to make absolutely sure you are satisfied with that service. Give us two weeks. If you are not happy, please call us, email us, let us know. We will try to work with you." Then the message turned into, "We have financial aid out there. If you need that, let us know and you can apply for this emergency aid."

We did not furlough any teacher, faculty, or staff and we explained that to our parents. One parent was incredibly gracious, but wanted his student to have more contact with her teacher. The principal called him directly to discuss. We did discount the Early Education Center Preschool weekly fee.

► **Richard:** Our Early Education tuition was discounted to \$75 per week. We got a great response from parents for the program. A lot of parents said, "Yes, this is a way that we would love to support our teachers."

► **Tracy:** Are you a 1:1 device school?

► **Richard:** Technology is slowly coming together. This has helped us see the need for 1:1 even more. We have approval and funding now. Our Annual Gift Giving Fundraiser helped us raise the funds for it. Since we had just finished our smartboard program, we were able to use our annual fundraiser to put toward finishing the Chromebook program through [ScholarBuys](#). We just ordered 600 more Chromebooks to finish it out. Our high school will be truly 1:1 by summer. The elementary and middle school Chromebook devices are mounted in the physical classroom, so those devices will not be going home. Elementary devices will be touch screen and will include more apps.

Our Enrichment Center was already 1:1 and we are slowly working at equipping our Early Ed program with devices because we are exploring a possible kiosk that gives parents the opportunity to check in and check out.

► **Tracy:** Aside from technology, we know that communication is so key during this time when you can't be physically together on campus. How did FACTS help you with communication to your families?

► **Richard:** FACTS' communication tools made it much easier for teachers. Here is the reason why: All our official communication was shared via email during COVID-19. To receive email, parents had to log in to FACTS

Family Portal to make necessary updates to their email address. But some parents had never even created a username. To log in, they were forced to create their credentials and update email addresses. It made our life easier because teachers now had updated emails for all parents. We had a lot of teachers before COVID-19 that never knew if a parent's email address had changed or if a new parent came in. Whereas now, the moment a parent updates their records, our teachers have that information. It's dynamic, and real-time, and always updated. That's made life a lot easier for our teachers. That is one thing they loved: just being able to send an email to every student if needed or single a student out and send to whomever they want to in that family. FACTS made our lives so much easier with those communication tools.

We also used Parent Alert and that has been a blessing for us as well. We used it for mass communication. For example, there were a few times we were sending out an urgent email related to the virus and we posted our [Level of Response](#), so we could send a Parent Alert text saying, "Hey, we sent you an email. If you did not receive it, contact it and we can help you update that." It helped us reach parents no matter the scenario.

► **Tracy:** What are some of the creative, fun things you did during this time to keep your community strong and engaged?

► **Angel:** We had a Virtual Talent show. I got the idea from the [CESA Professional Development](#) Zoom meeting. We streamed it on Facebook.

We also had a great principal video at the very onset of COVID-19. They did a little skit where they were in the library for story time holding stuffed animals, they played on scooters in the gym, they were in the cafeteria and in music class. Dr. Brown, our head of school, directed them while singing, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." It was incredibly sweet and unique.

The principals did their Town Halls virtually. Those were important to our families. They didn't skip a beat.

Our elementary teacher, Cayla Cecil, created Flat Teacher and challenged her students to take her along on three of their adventures.



When the seniors could not have their traditional Senior Chapel in the auditorium, our high school principal coordinated Wesleyan's Drive-in Senior Chapel complete with the big screen.

Our music teacher, Sarah Gray created videos to virtually teach elementary students new worship songs with actions at home so they would be able to sing them together in Chapel when they return to school.

- **Richard:** It also helped that these events were live. The Facebook Talent Show was a Premier Live event so everyone had to tune in at the same time. They could comment and talked to each other. They were able to provide feedback and see the community come together. It was a great thing!

For the principal video, it helped families see the principals having fun. We also made a blooper reel of it so they could see the teachers having a hard time with technology too. It showed families the other side where the teachers were learning as well.

► **Tracy:** What has your team done to adapt to COVID-19 for admissions and enrollment procedures?

- **Angel:** We had already developed a virtual slide show through our marketing partner, North Star Marketing. They handle our SEO and SEM. North Star Marketing created the [virtual tour](#) you see that is embedded on our website. But it is not live and it does not answer specific questions. So I created a way for parents to sign up for an on-campus tour or a virtual tour using a combination of a PowerPoint presentation, Zoom, and Calendly. If they were comfortable coming into the school, we were here. If they were not, they could sign up for the Zoom meeting. We always had a skeletal staff in the building.

When it comes to the admissions process, we already had it fully online through FACTS SIS, so that helped us out a lot. We did change testing criteria. We continued to test students, but we did that online. Our acceptance process did slow down because our admissions committee was not able to meet and review on a weekly basis.

We ramped things up again in June. I waived the application fee for a week. I sent that out to 160 to 170 folks who had inquired and not toured or who had toured, but not applied. We got approximately ten applications. It was a nice bump. I might do it again later in the summer.

We have great retention. We are at about 95% retention. We've had some attrition, but not more than normal. One of the biggest saving graces has been our financial aid office. Our finance team and our development director have been on it. We have an emergency COVID-19 assistance fund. That team has been great about reaching out to parents saying, "We are here to help you."

► **Tracy:** What are your top tips for marketing your school using social media right now?

- **Angel:** Our communication coordinator, Diane Stone, handles all our social media. We have a subscription to [Canva](#), which is an online graphic design platform. She uses that religiously to create our social media posts. The athletic director and I helped her upload the weekly principal meetings they did through Loom.

Social media has been vital for us. Diane had done a great job building up our social media presence. She was intent on making sure we told stories about the students and what they were doing. Seeing another student sitting at their kitchen table in front of a computer screen got old after a while. She pushed us to change it up, so we started telling stories. The teachers did awesome, especially Kayla Cecil with Flat Teacher. That was just amazing and the kids got a great kick out of it. The teachers were sharing those stories and sharing how we were getting out of the box. #wearewesleyan

► **Tracy:** What is the next big thing you're focusing on? What's next for Wesleyan?

► **Richard:** We are looking at best practices, at something universal for us with the steps for everyone laid out. This is the biggest thing from the technical and academic side whether we are on-campus or off-campus in the fall. We want everyone to know, "This is where we go to find the information we need."

We have also applied for CARES Act funds. FACTS has really helped us with that too. The FACTS Education Solution [webinar series](#) provided some great information. Donna Moss, Regional Vice President, directly answered some of the personal questions we had with the CARES Act and the PPP. We then contacted our LEA who has actually been very supportive helping us out in the past years with getting Title II and Title IV monies. We have Rosetta Stone coming in this fall and we have a lot going on with our tech for elementary. We have been approved for the FACTS Elevate conference, so I'll be coming with a crew every year. We are excited about that!

We plan to move to FACTS School Site too. I had a great chat with the School Site team who gave us a nice roadmap. We are counting down the days because we want to go full scale with FACTS. We are ready to get to one platform!

We just signed up for the FACTS Family App. We are really focused on the app and it is one big thing we are excited about. I hardly had to present it to the administration once they learned the legacy RenWeb Home would phase out. They also loved the old RenWeb Staff App. Our sports trainers and our nursing staff could pull information quickly. So, moving to the new app was pretty much a no brainer. They were excited and said, "Yes, we have to do this!"

Teachers need to have the same access on-the-go as they do in the classroom. For field trips or on the soccer field, it's critical. We were having to take binders of medical information for every student. Now we are realizing, "Hey, everyone has a phone and can pull up this info right in an app."

The app has also opened up the door for fundraising and gift giving opportunities and even more contact with families. We are excited about the ability to offer surveys to parents that way. The push notification functionality will be great. That is another thing we are going to love!

