

SOUTH KOREA: Sisters native and her family are educators abroad

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Sisters School District, is a Health and P.E. instructor in the middle years program, grades 7-10.

In an interview via email, the McNairs talked about their experience with government response, lockdown, testing, school closures and online teaching, while also offering words of wisdom and encouragement to their friends here in Sisters who are beginning to experience the same changes in everyday life due to the virus.

Nugget: When did you first discover that this virus was going to change the way of life in South Korea? Where did information come from?

McNairs: We started hearing things about the virus a few weeks after Christmas. We have many teaching friends in Shanghai as we taught at Concordia International School before coming to South Korea. We were hearing their stories of being on Chinese New Year and not being able to return to work in Shanghai due to the outbreak. In the beginning of February is when it started to hit South Korea in Daegu, which is south of Seoul. With how efficient public transit is and the number of people that travel within Korea on a regular basis we had a feeling it was only a matter of time. The Ministry of Education and Government provided most of our updates along with alerts we would get on our phones daily, which tell you where cases were occurring.

Nugget: What did you witness as the government's response to the arrival of the virus for you in Seoul?

McNairs: The government took action seriously and quickly. The Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE) and our school were in daily contact about recommendations for how to proceed daily. Testing was implemented quickly and efficiently with many testing sites available and mobile testing also became an option.

Nugget: What was it like for you once the schools shut down for you and your family? What are you doing with your own kids?

McNairs: As a few International schools shut-down we had the opportunity to meet as a staff to plan what our virtual roll-out would look like for the upcoming week. We did not initially know this would last longer than a week or two. Fortunately, we live on campus, so our kids are able to get together with other staff

kids daily for activities, learning, and general support. We were able to then pour more effort into virtual learning seeing our kids were taken care of, which we know is a daily challenge for families.

Nugget: How are you dealing with your jobs? Can you explain how you are delivering education to your students? How is that working? Do you have any suggestions for us here in Sisters?

McNairs: Virtual learning is dynamic and challenging as it's not just putting it out to students and being done, but constantly evaluating feedback from students and troubleshooting different platforms. As time goes on, procedures change, but as you become comfortable with one method it's good to experiment with other methods to reach a variety of learners. Through programs like Google classroom, Flipgrid, Seesaw, Zoom, Google Meets, we've been able to reach students here in South Korea and around the world. Days are spent collaborating with colleagues while still delivering lessons and giving feedback, which would not be possible without using multiple platforms.

One thing that has made this transition easier is that we were already using Google Classroom and Seesaw on a daily basis, so kids were familiar with where to initially access information and seek feedback.

Our advice to schools in Oregon trying to figure out how to do online education is to not "recreate the wheel," keep things very simple to start, and when the students and families

become accustomed to how you run your classroom and give feedback, you can then slowly implement other ways to keep learning interesting, and to engage your learners. We have noticed that through weeks of virtual learning motivation can deteriorate, so keeping virtual chats positive, and checking in often (using Zoom) truly helps students know you care. In early childhood, it's important to help not just the kids but the families create a routine to maintain consistency in their day.

Nugget: From your perspective, was South Korea's response as a country effective/reasonable? Do you have any sense of how to compare it to what is happening in the U.S.?

McNairs: South Korea was very effective considering there are over 13 million people in Seoul alone, and society is still able to function fairly well. Costco and store shelves are stocked, we're able to get what we need on a daily basis, and people are respectful of personal space and not hoarding goods. Our international airport (Incheon) has the ability to screen passengers, is well maintained, and a highly efficient airport. We can only compare what we've heard, and it's more important that people minimize risks to the elderly and sick by not taking chances that may possibly overwhelm the medical system. From what we've seen, by the time you say there are only a few cases in an area it has already spread beyond measure. Each week offers new challenges, and being a great neighbor is of utmost importance in times like this.

Nugget: Any words of wisdom for us here in Sisters who are just now adjusting to school shutdowns, restaurants and bars closed and only essential workers going into their jobs?

McNairs: Remember kids aren't as resilient as we may think they are and discuss this process in a thoughtful and measured manner. This virus is not something to fear, but something to respect and take head-on through responsible personal actions. Personal hygiene is as important as the professionals say, so heed their warnings, and use credible sources for information. When this pandemic does pass, go the extra mile to support local establishments, join as a community to celebrate the many blessings of being alive, and remember that love and peace will overcome fear. *We love you Sisters, Oregon!*

The McNairs cautioned that though things have improved greatly in South Korea, they know they are not "out of the woods" yet as far as the virus and its impact are concerned.

Anna said, "We still have new cases in the double digits daily in Seoul, and had a

recent case in our own neighborhood. We are expecting our current situation to remain part of the accepted norm.

Nugget: What else would you like to share?

McNairs: With summer approaching, our discussion of returning to the U.S. has been at the forefront of our daily thoughts and prayers. This is a time to rejuvenate, connect with friends and family, and enjoy Oregon. It is a true privilege to have this time as an educator, but more important is that we all support each other through this challenging and unknown time. Take time to love those around you, appreciate the value of personal health, and breathe that fresh mountain air. A virus knows no race or ethnicity, and we worry this has taken attention from the matter at hand.

• Anna's mother, Cindy, lives in Bend and the McNairs hope to be able to visit Sisters this summer during the break, but understand things, including travel, are uncertain.

"We love Sisters and its people and hope that everyone gets through this crisis as well as possible," she said.



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