School will not look the same in the fall.
That’s what Curt Bonk, professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University, thinks because whether students are able to return to classrooms in the fall or not, there are too many forced experimental happenings depending on things to return to the way they were.

Bonk, a former CWRU math teacher and Ph.D. degree in educational psychology and author of many books about emerging technology and educational psychology and author of many books about emerging technology and e-learning, and that some people who were resistant of the ideas.

Corporations were afraid of online learning until they started doing it themselves, he said, and about a decade ago, there was a shift in thinking that the higher education level India has always been a leader in technology and education, particularly online, at the higher education level, he said.

But at the K-12 level, the state, online learning has been hit or miss. A recent study in Indiana revealed that students fell further behind after transferring to virtual charter schools. Some virtual schools are also associated with scandals, such as Indiana Virtual School and Indiana Virtual Pathways Academy, which misreported enrollment numbers and miscounted more than 380 million dollars in state funds.

That concerns concern here, Bonk said. “The K-12 level has evolved and flowed, especially in this state where we have dozens of virtual schools and they then have had to develop distance learning and change the rules,” Bonk said.

Bonk does foresee people having to return to online learning, at the K-12 level, though it’s too soon to really get a handle on how many people will have to jump to extend a virtual system that has grown for districts such as the School Corporation of Richmond and Bean Blossom Community School Corp.

A lot of the pros and cons will not be apparent until months down the road, people are really doing things on the fly in many ways,” Bonk said.

“Some might not be aware of their successes as well as their failures because things are happening so fast, and that might be a good thing because it changes the process into a difficult one for human beings,” Bonk explains.

“The first stage is awareness of what can be done with online learning and technology, the second is resistance, the third is understanding what’s possible, the fourth is trying it out, the fifth is sharing what you’re doing, and the sixth is advocacy.”

“The online learning space in Indiana for K-12 has been stuck in the awareness and resistance stage for the most part,” Bonk said. “It’s rare, because of coronavirus, been pushed for years. Everybody has been forced to jump into trying e-learning and e-teaching, they have skipped stage one, two, three, and four,” Bonk said, and hadn’t had adequate training to go back to that stage.

“Let’s try to teach this way in the future,” Bonk said, “let’s fix the logistics out this way some or home because of the 14,000 people, there’s going to be an emerging level of outside services for professional development of teachers and educators, administrators.”

Starting in 1998, Bonk had a project focused on rural Indiana teachers and technology integration, the TICKIT project, and the state was providing related grants. After a demoralizing in the economy around 2000, that money came to an end, but the project ran through 2002.

“The state at that time, 20 years ago, was doing this, was giving school districts money for infrastructure as well as professional development of teachers, and that has to return,” Bonk said. “It’s in kind of idea has to return and that makes a lot of sense.”

Emergency preparedness training for online learning will take place to prepare for any number of events, such as natural disasters or viruses, he said. This isn’t the first time people have had to adapt to catastrophe, but people tend to be reactive, not proactive, he said.

As for students without reliable internet access, Bonk said organizations are already developing ways to get people broadband internet access for a low cost, and those are global in nature, and will have to be internet stations of some sort in rural communities in the future.

“That’s going to have to be federal in nature as well as state in nature,” Bonk explained, “expanding broadband network within this country, and of course, then around the world, it’s going to be addressed because it’s an obvious concern,” Bonk said.

Bonk also predicts that there will be more blended volunteers from the states that are partly face to face and partly virtual, as there will be more people will be less resistant to that idea. It could be possible for someone in a school to be known as the blended learning expert, he said. The blended learning option could be helpful in cases where students are at home for any reason, such as during a flu outbreak, or for students who are pregnant or who have children.

Bonk said a majority of people who have been hesitant or reluctant of online learning will now embrace it and become the leaders in the future. In some cases, teachers, who were burnt out, said, but others will see this as a breath of fresh air and will see teaching in a new way.

Technology can completely transform teaching and allow for people to totally rethink the way a school operates, he said, and it can enhance and extend teaching.

Enhancing a bit could look like an online discussion or an online discussion forum or online could look like having students work with people from other countries or from other school districts via an online platform.

As for students without reliable internet access, Bonk said organizations are already developing ways to get people broadband internet access for a low cost, and those are global in nature, and will have to be internet stations of some sort in rural communities in the future.

“That’s going to have to be federal in nature as well as state in nature,” Bonk explained, “expanding broadband network within this country, and of course, then around the world, it’s going to be addressed because it’s an obvious concern,” Bonk said.

While there aren’t one set list of changes to come re-evaluating about them, they are coming, some more immediate than others.

This story is the first in a series on the future of K-12 education. Contact Emily Cox at 812-331-4243 or ecox@herald-times.com for more information. Follow her on Twitter @HT_Ecox