



American International School of Zagreb

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Directors Update

March 20, 2020

Dear AISZ Community,

Thank you for your resilience during our first week of Virtual Learning. It is amazing to think that a month ago we were on Ski Break with little idea we would soon be working from home and that the term social distancing - a term I have never heard before - has become such an important part of our lives.

In this update, I discuss the impact of the heightened restrictions announced by the Government of Croatia and I conclude with guidelines for parents drawn from the *American School in Japan*. International schools by nature are hugely collaborative rather than competitive and nothing shows this more than times of crisis. This guide has been adapted from their social collaborative commons work on distance education for the current situation facing us at AISZ.

School Closure Extended until April 19th

Due to the recent announcement by the Government of Croatia to extend restrictions on public gatherings and the closure of more shops, organizations and the increased call to work from home, all schools will be closed until the 19th of April. This will include our Spring Break. Our new target opening date is now April 20th 2020 - all going well. However, this is an ever changing situation and we will need to remain flexible as the situation demands.

IBDP Exams

All schools around the world are looking to the International Baccalaureate Organization for advice with regard to the May examination schedule. We have been told we will be updated before March 27th. Ms. Hawkins will keep all our IBDP students and families up to date.

Survey

Some students will thrive with distance learning, while others may struggle. We ask that parents remember most teachers are not experts in distance learning and that it will require some trial-and-error before we find the right balance between online and offline learning experiences. To this end I will be sending to all parents a link to a feedback survey. As I indicated in my last Update, we may need to adjust our levels of VLP in order to sustain prolonged closure. It is really important to us that we get your experiences so we know if we need to adjust anything and if so how much adjusting do we need to do.

Online Meetings

The school administration, Board, and teachers are all meeting virtually as well and since the school closure has been extended, I would like to set up a virtual community meeting in the near future where I can address some of your questions directly. I am not sure when this will be just yet, or what form it will take, but I will reach out to you when we have established the best way to do this. Also due to the extended closure of AISZ, the Academic Conferences scheduled for April 1 have been cancelled for the moment. We will revise the format and timing of these and inform you well in advance.

10 Guidelines for AISZ Parents

Adapted with gratitude to the [American School in Japan, Tokyo](#)

The transition to distance learning will be challenging for families. Parents will need to think differently about how to support their children; how to create structures and routines that allow their children to be successful; and how to monitor and support their children's learning. Some students will thrive with distance learning, while others may struggle. The ten guidelines provided below are intended to help parents think about what they can do to help their children find success in a distance learning environment.

1—Establish routines and expectations

AISZ encourages parents to set regular hours for their children's school work. We suggest students begin their studies at 8:00am. Keep normal bedtime routines for younger children and expect the same from your MS- and HS-aged students, too. (Don't let them stay up late and sleep in!) Your children should move regularly and take periodic breaks as they study.

2—Define the physical space for your child's study

Your child may have a regular place for doing homework under normal circumstances, but this space may or may not be suitable for an extended period of time. We encourage families to establish a space/location where their children will learn most of the time. This should be a public/family space, not in a child's bedroom. It should be a place that can be quiet at times and have a strong wireless internet signal, if possible. Above all, it should be a space where parents are present and monitoring their children's learning.

3—Monitor communications from your children's teachers

Teachers will communicate with parents through email, when and as necessary. The frequency and detail of these communications will be determined by your children's ages, maturity, and their degree of independence. AISZ wants parents to contact their children's teachers. However, we ask parents to remember that teachers will be communicating with dozens of other families, if not 100+, and that communications should be essential, succinct, and self-aware. We also encourage parents to have their children explain the Learning Management Systems (e.g. Managebac, Seesaw, Google GSuite, Zoom) teachers are using.

4—Begin and end each day with a check-in

Parents are encouraged to start and finish each day with a simple check-in. In the morning, ask what is your child learning today? What are their learning targets or goals? How will they spend their time? What resources do they require? What support do they need? This brief grounding conversation matters. It allows children to process the instructions they've received from their teachers. It helps them organize themselves and set priorities. Older students may not want to have these check-ins with parents (that's normal!), but they should nevertheless. Parents should establish these check-ins as regular parts of each day. Not all students thrive in a distance learning environment; some struggle with too much independence or lack of structure. These check-in routines need to be established early, before students fall behind or begin to struggle.

5—Take an active role in helping your children process and own their learning.

In the course of a regular school day at AISZ, your son or daughter engages with other students or adults dozens if not hundreds of times. These social interactions and opportunities for mediation include turning to a peer to exchange a thought or idea, participating in small or large group discussions, asking questions for clarification, collaborating on group projects, and countless other moments. While some of these social interactions will be re-created on virtual platforms, others will not. Human beings learn best when they have opportunities to process their learning with others. Beyond the check-ins recommended at the start and end of each day, parents should regularly circle back and engage with their children about what they're learning. However, it's important that your child owns their work; don't complete assignments for them, even when they are struggling.

6—Establish times for quiet and reflection

A huge challenge for families with multiple children will be how to manage all of their children's needs, especially when those children are different ages and have different needs. There may be times when siblings need to work in different rooms to avoid distraction. Parents may even experiment with noise-cancelling headphones (no music necessary!) to block out distractions.

7—Encourage physical activity and/or exercise

Make sure your children remember to move and exercise. This is vitally important to their health, wellbeing, and to their learning. AISZ's physical education teachers will recommend activities or exercises, but it is important for parents to model and encourage exercise! Think also about how your children can contribute more around the house with chores or other responsibilities. Don't let your children off their responsibilities to the family – expect them to help at home!

8—Remain mindful of your child's stress or worry

During school closure and online learning it is imperative for parents to help their children manage the worry, anxiety, and range of emotions they may experience. Difficult though it may be, do your best not to transfer your stress or worry to your children. They will be out of sorts, whether they admit it or not, and need as much normal routine as parents can provide.

9—Monitor how much time your child is spending online

AISZ does not want its students staring at computer screens for 7-8 hours a day. We ask that parents remember most teachers are not experts in distance learning and that it will require some trial-and-error before we find the right balance between online and offline learning experiences. Division principals or teachers will periodically check in with you to assess what you're seeing at home and what we need to adjust. We thank you in advance for your patience and partnership!

10—Keep your children social, but set rules around their social media interactions

At first there is excitement and novelty around Virtual Learning for students. The initial excitement of school being closed however, quickly fades when students start missing their friends, classmates, and teachers. Help your children maintain contact with friends and see them in person when circumstances permit. Please also monitor your children's social media use, especially during an extended school closure. Older students will rely more on social media to communicate with friends. Social media apps such as SnapChat, Instagram, WhatsApp, or Facebook are not official, school-sanctioned channels of communication. AISZ asks parents to monitor their children's use of social media. Remind your children to be polite, respectful, and appropriate in their communications and to represent your family's values in their interactions with others. A student's written words and tone can sometimes offend or cause harm to others.