



American International School of Zagreb

Accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
Authorized by the International Baccalaureate

Directors Update March 23, 2020

Dear AISZ Community,

I hope your first day of recovery from yesterday's earthquakes has been good to you. I have not been informed of any of our community being hurt yesterday and if that is true, I am genuinely relieved. Each of us will approach the recovery differently and while the City still experiences tremors it can still be a terrifying or at least unsettling experience. Having spoken to many today, I have heard stories of anxiousness, unease and lack of sleep as the tremors continued through until today depending on where the person was living. Other stories are of those that haven't been impacted as much. People still have intermittent Internet and communications. A whole staff SMS I sent to staff just after the quake yesterday arrived at 08:30 this morning, while international SMS went through perfectly.

We still have faculty who are now sharing accommodation and some have not been able to return to their apartments to gather clothes and personal items let alone teaching resources. Currently we are looking for alternative homes for them. Families of our students are in similar circumstances with families sharing accommodations and experiencing intermittent communications.

In times like this, the idea of Virtual Learning can be a support, an added pressure or even a final overwhelming burden. It is with this in mind and that fact that many of our faculty too are putting their lives back together, that AISZ VLP will be of a flexible nature this week – or for as long as it takes.

I have asked teachers to set flexible learning tasks this week to allow families to be able to access, participate, leave and return – or to set aside completely - as it works best for them. It is impossible for us to know each family's individual circumstance so it is important that people have the freedom and flexibility to come to VLP as each family requires for the time being.

In the coming days, taking care of ourselves and each other has to be the priority; like moving to a new city, getting the house in order sets the foundation for all else, including all things academic.

1. Learning in the Lower School this week

Many have been asking what learning will look like for our LS students this week. We are aware that some students and faculty are ready and able to get on with teaching and learning, and others do not have an Internet connection or they've even been displaced. So, this week the teachers will be sharing open-ended projects and activities with their students with the understanding that the activities won't be required or assessed, nor would they involve students learning new skills. Instead, the activities will be grounded in what students already know or are currently working on, inquiry-based investigations that encourage critical thinking, or simply a creative outlet. Most important is to recognize that all of us need the flexibility to take care of our families, our emotional well being, and ourselves.

2. Learning in the Upper School this week

The basic outline of the day will remain similar but adjustments may be made to allow for families and faculty to work around their needs to put lives back together. Students should not be on the computer the whole day and

longer term work will be set allowing students to come to the work as they and their families need. We will use this time to revise work without bringing any new learning to the week, as we cannot guarantee all families have the same access. Enabling students to settle into a work routine, make decisions about their focus, and being creative can go a long way in building resilience and recovery. Time will be built into the week for teachers just to “be” with their students; to support each other emotionally. The whole concept of summative and formative seems to be fluid right now, especially for grading.

It's incredible that an earthquake day interrupted our first attempt at virtual community. If teachers can connect with their individual homerooms every attempt will be made to do so. This may not be possible for some but it will help maintain our collective mental health

3. Advice from our Whole School Counselor, Ms. Andrea Diamant,

On the subject of mental health, Ms. Diamant has advice for all of us:

All of us, families and teachers alike, are now in the process of getting physical and emotional houses in order. We are recognizing fear, shock, anxiety and uncertainty in ourselves. We are tired, wondering what happens next.

What do we know? We are safe. We are surrounded by those we care for and care for us. We know we will all be here, alongside those supportive others, for the time being. Working within what we know, how to get that grounded feeling back again?!

In the [bulletin](#) last week, Laura Palmer and I wrote about managing the transition to Virtual Learning. Little did we know that our advice would reach beyond learning to day-to-day management of the shocks(!) of an earthquake.

Put the pressure of assessments and grades on hold. Focus on a different kind of learning, learning that allows for communication, togetherness, flexibility and creativity. Right now, every minute, kids are learning about themselves - that it's OK to feel scared, that people are safe, to ask for help, how resilient they are, the strengths they have to manage and so much more! What an opportunity - focus the learning there for the moment. Reading, Writing, Maths, Science will come along, but only once focus and grounding are back. Even universities are talking about the need to put support plans in place, recognizing that students might need academic support in year 1.

We are all giving you, as a community, permission to...

1. Focus on communicating those FEELINGS - Name them to tame them! As a family and/or individual, keep a journal. Write words, poems, and sentences - big, small, bold, soft, colors. Draw - anything that comes out, take photos. Share the biggest feeling of the day, the smallest. Share what feeling takes over in the moments when the fear goes away?

2. Focus on the safety that TOGETHERNESS brings - create things together; food, gardening, journaling, videos and story telling.

3. Focus on STRUCTURE WITH FLEXIBILITY - Structure is great, inflexibility is not. Understand that attention times might be shorter with minds elsewhere. Ask your child what creative ways they can think of to review and show what they already know during the "school" day? It feels good to go back to what we know when there is so much we don't know in the moment!

Andrea Diamant

4. An Update from the International Baccalaureate

As shared with Seniors and their Families this morning, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) released this statement today:

To our IB Students and Families,

The International Baccalaureate Organization has announced that the May examinations for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and Career-related Programme will not be held this year due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic.

As an organization, it is critical for the IB to ensure that the options it provides its global community of IB World Schools are based on compassion and fairness for the difficult circumstances that its students and educators are experiencing. As a result, based on considerable advice from stakeholders across the globe, including schools, students, universities and official bodies, the IB has determined what it believes to be the most responsible and ethical way forward.

The May 2020 examinations as scheduled between 30 April and 22 May for Diploma Programme and Career-related Programme candidates will no longer be held.

Depending on what they registered for, the student will be awarded a Diploma or a Course Certificate which reflects their standard of work. This is based on student's coursework and the established assessment expertise, rigor and quality control already built into the programmes.

We know parents and students will have many questions. The IB will share full details and FAQs with us and on [their website](#) by 27 March 2020.

Please contact our IB Coordinator Ms. Hawkins if you have any queries. We will continue to work with the IBO in the best interest of our students.

Be safe and healthy and we will get through this together.

Sincerely,

Paul Buckley

Director AISZ.