

Coronavirus Closures and Online Learning for Schools

With the spread of the COVID 19 coronavirus and the potential of school closures, you may be considering online learning as an option for your students in order to ensure continuity of learning. We have harnessed the expertise of our online educators and our teaching colleagues around the world, to bring you the best ideas to making this transition as smooth and effective as possible.

First of all, it is good practice for all schools to have a digital strategy and a plan in place so they can move to online learning quickly if necessary. And this is something you can begin today starting with some of the strategies and steps we have identified below.

Ensuring digital equity is the first step. All teachers and students need access to devices and the internet at home, so surveying staff and students to identify anyone who may need these resources is a priority. **Students with special and additional educational needs may need additional tools and supports** or adult/ parental assistance so this needs to be considered and planned for.

Communication is crucial – so schools need a plan for regular communication and updates between staff, and parents and pupils too. An information pack for parents and pupils with FAQs and clear information on how the school intends to respond and operate during the closure and clear expectations will be mission critical. Schools should consider assembling a learning pack for students with activities, study resources, links to tasks to be completed online and open-ended activities that children can lead themselves. Key questions to ask are:

- Have you and your students taken home any belongings you will need from desks and lockers?
- What will the timetable look like & how often will live online sessions take place?
- Will there be a mix of teacher-guided live lessons with all students and smaller collaborative online student led groups, independent learning activities?

For teachers, **preparation and planning are key**, not only in terms of the class content, time and commitment but also thinking about how you keep your students motivated and engaged from a distance. When you are teaching online, you need to work harder to ensure engagement and connection and build that sense of belonging in your online class.

Simple things like greeting each student as they join you on the web as you would face to face can make a big difference in terms of responsiveness. **Support and setting expectations are essential** with regular contact and high visibility.

For younger children, there is a need to consider **parental support** for things like setting the camera and audio up for their child and allowing adequate time for them to answer the question

For older children, **online learning activities** are the heart and soul of the online classroom and interaction in discussion forums is key. Consider problem solving or Socratic questions (challenging assumptions or asking for evidence) to keep them engaged. Break learning into smaller chunks and provide regular feedback to keep pupils motivated. Be sure to supplement online resources with some real time sessions if possible, to maintain social connection and support.

Technology is obviously key for online learning and **choosing the right tools** from the vast array can seem intimidating. Moodle is the learning environment that we use at ICEP Europe but there are many other options out there. Some popular tools include: Google classrooms, Microsoft teams, Onenote, Seesaw and Nearpod. There are also more elaborate tools out there such as the Artificial Intelligence-powered platform, Century Tech, game-based learning Kahoot!, Discovery Education and apps such as Book Creator and Quizlet. But for now, specially if you are relatively new to online learning, we recommend that you **keep it simple, use a limited range of tools, decide what will work for you and stick with it** – this will ensure consistency and will also mean you and your students don't become overwhelmed.

Providing emotional support is also going to be key, especially given the unprecedented circumstances and the potential toll of isolation. it will be important to check in with students to see if they have concerns and anxieties about the coronavirus and need extra help or emotional support. Setting up networks with your colleagues to support each other by phone daily and organizing virtual meetings will help combat the isolation of working from home and provide that sense of connection

We wish you all well and hope you and your students keep safe and healthy. Best of luck with teaching and learning online and if there are any more specific details you need, feel free to reach out to us on social.