IST Distance Learning Plan

March 2020

IST Distance Learning Plan

Overview

This document is designed to describe the actions and approach IST will take in the event of an extended campus closure.

We endeavor in this Distance Learning Plan (DLP) to provide a flexible distance learning framework with guidelines that can be implemented in a variety of circumstances. This DLP describes IST's approach to distance learning; the channels we will use for communication; the Learning Management Systems (LMS) we will employ by grade; the roles, responsibilities, and expectations IST has for faculty, parents, and students; guidelines for how parents/guardians can support their children's learning; and a host of other priorities and considerations tailored to make the best of challenging circumstances.

If IST's campus is closed and this DLP is implemented, the Head of School will send a communication to both parents and faculty/staff making this announcement and delineating a timeline for implementation. An exact date will be designated when distance learning will begin for IST students.

IST Mission Statement

IST provides a comprehensive education that is inquiry-based and internationally-minded, enabling children to become life-long learners.

IST students are knowledgeable, empathetic and caring global citizens, inspired to take action and solve problems for the betterment of themselves, others and the world around them.

Distance Learning at IST

IST's approach to distance learning begins with the assertion that the learning experiences teachers design when school is in regular session cannot be simply replicated via remote / online tools such as videoconferencing or Google Classroom. In particular, the invaluable social interactions and mediation that occurs naturally among students and between teachers and students cannot be recreated in the same way. Additionally, teachers must find new methods for providing timely and specific feedback to support student growth and learning. Accordingly, this DLP provides guidelines and insights about how IST's faculty can leverage digital and experiential learning in ways that bring curriculum to life.

IST deliberately uses the term distance learning rather than technology-specific labels such as "virtual learning," "e-learning," or "online classes." This choice reflects our conviction that quality learning can occur at a distance without solely relying on computers. Rather than being tied to an electronic device for their learning, IST's goal is for students to read, communicate, and engage in authentic learning experiences, while continuing to be physically active.

During distance learning preparation, we encourage teachers to think differently about the opportunities and possibilities that may result from the challenging circumstances associated with any school closure. As teachers reflect on how to best design or redesign their units and lessons, we encourage them to consider the following questions:

- How can I leverage digital platforms to provide learning experiences rich in engagement, social interaction, and feedback?
- How can I help my students manage the worry, fear, or isolation they may be experiencing as a result of this emergency or crisis?
- What are the most important understandings and skills I can help my students develop at this time? and How can I help my students construct their own understandings?
- What are the authentic learning opportunities that have resulted from this emergency or crisis? and Where might my students' curiosity and motivation open other new possibilities?
- How can I design learning experiences that address the needs of different types of learners who need different kinds of support and guidance?
- How will I assess student learning in meaningful ways?

At the core of IST's approach to distance learning is the belief we should think differently about our priorities when responding to challenging circumstances, and we should embrace new opportunities for students to learn in authentic, meaningful ways. We endeavor to apply a simplistic and pragmatic approach in order that our distance learning can be accessed by all, and practically and easily applied.

Technology Systems to Support Distance Learning

Q1 How will IST communicate with parents, students, and faculty/staff in the event of an extended campus closure?

A IST will continue to use the same channels it employs for normal day-to-day communications with parents, students, and faculty/staff. All of these systems are remotely accessible and will function in an emergency situation. They contain auditing tools that will allow IST to ensure that all students and parents are receiving important communications.

The table below describes these systems:

Channel	Audience	Description & Access
Email	Faculty, staff, parents and students	Email will be used for all major communications and announcements, including those from the Head of school. Lead and Support Teachers will also use email to communicate, although they will use other platforms to interact with their students as well.
Google GSuite	MYP students, G3 and 4 students	Google GSuite (including Gmail, Docs, Classroom, Hangouts, Meet, etc.) will continue to be the platform used by MYP and Upper PYP teachers. For video conferencing in small or large groups, we will use Google Hangouts or Google Meet.
Seesaw	Parents and students (EC – MYP)	Seesaw will continue to be the platform used by teachers across both the PYP and MYP programmes, to both share and receive information, resources, instructions, photos, videos etc.
Zoom	Parents and students	Zoom provides secure video communication

	(EC – MYP)	services for hybrid classrooms https://zoom.us/education
Pre-recorded Videos	Parents and students (EC – MYP)	For messages, sharing of information or certain lessons, pre-recorded videos by teachers and staff may be used.
Google Drive	Staff	The Staff GDrive will continue to be used a s a shared area for staff to access to both share and receive information, resources, planning etc.
School Website	General public	IST will maintain general information on its closure status for the public at https://internationalschooloftexas.com/

Note: IST is continually evaluating the efficacy of its tools and may adjust the systems and processes we use.

Q2   Are the learning management systems (LMS) employed in this plan the same as those used during normal school operations?

A   Yes, IST's systems are already built on cloud-based systems, including Google GSuite and Seesaw. That means these systems will continue to work from anywhere in the world, even during an emergency. IST's data is not physically hosted on the school's network, which means we can continue to use our systems during a crisis, even if buildings are damaged or our campus is inaccessible. Finally, each of our primary systems has multiple administrators, so they can be managed remotely (from anywhere, online) by more than one person, in the event that a system administrator is out of contact or unavailable.

Q3   How will IST ensure that students have access to these systems from off-campus?

A	MYP students are each equipped with their own Chromebooks, which they bring home every night. In the event that campus closure seems likely, teachers would attempt to ensure all students in Grades 2, 3 and 4 also have access to a device. If they do not have access to a personal device at home, they will be able to borrow a school laptop and charger for the duration of the school closure. Students in Grades EC – Grade 1 will be set a variety of work that can involve both online and offline activities, should they not have access to a personal device at their home. Also, most of our technology tools are not device-specific, which means students will be able to access learning through parental devices, phones, etc. in the event that they are unable to borrow a school device.

Ten Guidelines for IST's Teachers

The transition to distance learning will not be simple or easy. Teachers will need to think differently about how to communicate, give instruction, and provide feedback; how to design lessons and assignments that are authentic and meaningful; and how to ensure students continue to collaborate and communicate with others. The ten guidelines provided below are intended to help teachers across all divisions reflect on challenges they'll confront in shifting to distance learning.

1—Caring and Empathy

In the event of a crisis that leads to implementation of this DLP, your students may be stressed or worried. Before diving into curriculum, take the time to assess your students' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. How are they doing? How are their families?

Continue regular check-ins with your students as long as this DLP is in place.

2—Evaluate your students' conditions for distance learning

While most students will have reliable online access at home and the necessary devices to shift to distance learning, others will not. Teachers should remember that each family's circumstances will vary and they should avoid assumptions about limitations or restrictions students are facing. Ask your students and/or their parents to confirm their location; whether their online access is reliable; and what devices the student has at their disposal. Open a dialogue with families and avoid assumptions that all students' circumstances are the same.

3—Stick with the familiar

Especially in the first weeks after moving to this DLP, teachers should continue using existing communication channels and learning management systems, which are described on page 3. In other words, stick with what's familiar to your students. Teachers should remember that while many students will thrive with distance learning, others will struggle. In the event that the school remains closed for a longer period of time, it may become necessary to explore new or different learning platforms that provide different experiences. In the beginning, stick with the familiar.

4—Less is more

Should IST implement this DLP, one challenge confronting teachers will be how to best streamline content and elevate the most essential learning for students. In other words, teachers need to take a less-is-more perspective, including the pacing of lessons and assignments. It can also be hard to know exactly how long school closure might last, which makes longer-term planning difficult.

5—Seize the moment; embrace new opportunities and possibilities for your students

Years or decades from now, how will your students remember the emergency that resulted in school closure? While distance learning should attempt to bring some normalcy and routine to students' lives, teachers shouldn't ignore the opportunities resulting from school closure either. Teachers might require students to keep a daily journal or diary for the duration of the crisis. Personal journaling and/or other creative writing assignments can help students process their thoughts, worries, and emotions, particularly in times of crisis. Students might use other media as well, including video, drawing, painting, and music. Moreover, the crisis might also provide other real-life opportunities to study scientific phenomena associated with the crisis, how the media is reporting the incident, how governments are responding, and many other opportunities to seize the moment and design new learning transdisciplinary experiences for our students.

6—Provide space for personalized learning

Distance learning can provide opportunities for students to personalize what, how, and when they learn. Students can move more flexibly and freely through content when teachers create nonlinear curricula. Distance learning can also provide students with the opportunity to learn at different paces. School closure could also create opportunities for more authentic learning, particularly if students are spread around the world. What museums, galleries, concerts, or memorials might they experience where they're located? How might they share these alternative experiences with their classmates? How might students be empowered to create their own learning pathways and experiences?

7—Designers of experience; facilitators of learning

In shifting to distance learning, it is especially important for teachers to think of themselves as designers of experiences and facilitators of learning (as opposed to distributors of knowledge). Distance learning places a premium on a teacher's ability to think more deeply about how to introduce content, design experiences, and coach students with thoughtful, specific feedback. Teachers need to establish conditions where students have a clear sense of purpose, opportunities to express themselves, and experiences that allow them to work toward mastery. This will help students stay motivated and engaged in learning, even when they are not physically at school.

8—Design asynchronous learning experiences

When school is closed and students are spread across many time zones, or students are not able to access learning all at the same time, teachers can still connect them asynchronously. For example, teachers can use familiar LMS discussion forums or tools to allow for student responses during a set time, knowing that students might not all be online at the same exact time.

9—Design synchronous learning experiences

When it comes to student engagement and learning, relationships matter as much online as they do in person. If IST's campus was closed, students might be able to gather for synchronous learning times via video chat using Google Hangouts (also known as Google Meet) or Zoom. Collaboration remains important and there are many ways teachers can foster it through synchronous learning.

10—Think differently about assessment

Assessment is one of the most challenging adjustments for teachers new to distance learning. Distance learning should be seen as an opportunity for students, individually or collaboratively, to complete

writing assignments, design infographics, make video presentations, or complete oral assessments via video chat. Teachers are encouraged to think differently about the end goal to performance instead of forcing a traditional assessment method that doesn't fit distance learning. Thinking differently about assessment will positively influence the experience for students, leverage the strengths of distance learning, and prevent frustration on the teacher's part when traditional methods do not work.

Ten Guidelines for IST's Parents

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

From the first day IST implements its DLP, parents need to establish routines and expectations. IST encourages parents to set regular hours for their children's school work. We suggest students begin their studies at the regular school hours of 8am for LYP and 8,20 for PYP. Keep normal bedtime routines for all students (don't let them stay up late and sleep in!) Your children should move regularly and take periodic breaks as they study. It is important that parents set these expectations for how their children will spend their days starting as soon as distance learning is implemented, not several days later after it becomes apparent a child is struggling with the absence of routine.

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, as will be the case if this DLP is implemented. 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 and Seesaw, 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. IST wants parents to contact their children's teachers. However, we ask parents to remember that teachers and administrators will be communicating with many other families 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. Seesaw, Google GSuite) 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 have them 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 IST, 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. IST's physical education teacher will recommend activities or exercises, but it is important for parents to model and encourage exercise! Think also about how your children can pitch in more around the house with chores or other responsibilities. Don't let your children off the hook – expect them to pitch in!

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

One thing is for certain: IST will only implement this DLP if a serious emergency has occurred. Should this happen, 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

IST 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. 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

There's always excitement when IST closes school for snow days or unforeseen circumstances. If IST implements this DLP, the initial excitement of school being closed will fade quickly when students

start missing their friends, classmates, and teachers. Help your children maintain contact with friends and see them in person if 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. IST 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.

Roles & Responsibilities During Distance Learning

Many stakeholders will contribute to the effective implementation of this DLP. The roles and responsibilities of school personnel, students, and parents, are delineated below.

School Personnel Roles & Responsibilities	
Leadership Team	• Create and distribute IST's Distance Learning Plan, or DLP • Establish clear channels of communications between faculty, staff, families, and students in the event of this DLP being activated • Support faculty and students/families shifting to a distance learning environment • Help teachers implement DLP and ensure high-quality learning experience for all students
Emergency Preparedness Team	• Support all teachers and teams in the implementation of IST's DLP • Provide models and examples of outstanding distance learning units and lessons • Recommend new methods techniques for providing feedback to students • Support teachers and teams as they design new methods to assess student learning • Support teachers and teams in developing strategies to differentiate their instruction
Lead & MYP Specialist Teachers	• Collaborate with other members of your team or department to design distance • learning experiences for your students • Communicate frequently with your students and, as needed, with their parents

	• Provide timely feedback to support your students' learning • Reflect on the 10 Guidelines for IST's Teachers shared earlier in the DLP and how you can implement them • Provide guidance and support for students to aid in monitoring and supporting student wellbeing
Support Teachers	• Communicate regularly with classroom teachers to identify ways you can support students and contribute to this DLP • Monitor student learning and provide feedback to students, as requested by the teachers you support • Offer to scaffold or modify assignments to support subject or classroom teachers • Help subject or classroom teacher differentiate lessons and activities for the students • Communicate regularly with students and/or their parents to ensure they have success with distance learning
EC-G4 Specialist Teachers	• Physical Education – Develop a bank of exercises, physical activities, and competitions for students and share these with classroom teachers and families • Art – Staying mindful of the resources and tools families may not have in their home, develop a bank of projects and activities for students and share these with classroom teachers and families • Music – Staying mindful of the instruments or resources families may not have in their home, develop a bank of activities for students and

	share these with classroom teachers and families • Communicate regularly with your students and provide timely feedback to them • Collaborate with classroom teachers on how to integrate music, art, and physical education into classroom projects and experiences.
EC-G4 Language Teachers	• Collaborate with colleagues in designing Distance Learning experiences in accordance with schoolwide plans • Develop high-quality learning experiences • Communicate with and provide timely feedback to students and parents
Tech Support	• Review and develop how-to tutorials, ensuring teachers, students, and parents have the necessary manuals to excel in a distance learning environment • Continually monitor the needs of teachers, students, and parents and troubleshoot their challenges, as needed • Be available in person or remotely to provide on-demand tech support help • Audit usage to identify students or parents who may be unavailable or out of reach

Student Roles & Responsibilities

- Establish daily routines for engaging in the learning experiences with a defined start, end and break times.
- Identify a comfortable, quiet space in your home where you can work effectively and successfully
- Regularly monitor online platforms (SeeSaw, email, etc.) to check for announcements and feedback from your teachers
- Complete assignments with integrity and academic honesty, doing your best work
- Do your best to meet timelines, commitments, and due dates
- Communicate proactively with your teachers if you cannot meet deadlines or require additional support
- Collaborate and support your IST peers in their learning
- Comply with IST's Digital Citizenship Policy, including expectations for online etiquette
- Proactively seek out and communicate with other adults at IST as different needs arise (see below)

For queries about...	Contact...
A learning engagement, activity, assignment, resource	Relevant Lead or Specialist Teacher
A personal, emotional or social issue	Lead Teacher
A technology related problem or issue	Tech Support techsupport@istexas.org
Any other issues with distance learning	Head or Deputy Head of School

Parent/Guardian Roles & Responsibilities
Provide support for your children by adhering to the 10 Guidelines for IST's Parents as well as you can: • Establish routines and expectations   • Define the physical space for your child's study   • Monitor communications from your children's teachers   • Begin and end each day with a check-in   • Take an active role in helping your children process their learning   • Establish times for quiet and reflection   • Encourage physical activity and/or exercise   • Remain mindful of your child's stress or worry   • Monitor how much time your child is spending online   • Keep your children social, but set rules around their social media interactions

For queries about...	Contact...
A learning engagement, activity, assignment, resource	Relevant Lead or Specialist Teacher
A personal, emotional or social issue	Lead Teacher
A technology related problem or issue	Tech Support techsupport@istexas.org
Any other issues with distance learning	Head or Deputy Head of School

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMME

EARLY CHILDHOOD 1 - PRE KINDERGARTEN

After receiving initial notice from the Head of School about school closure and timelines, families will receive an email from their Lead Teacher with more specific information.

- The primary tools for communication between teachers and families will be Seesaw and email.
- Distance learning for ELC children will remain holistically focused on broad language, cognitive, physical and social-emotional development.
- Learning activities and experiences will emphasize interaction and creativity. These activities will require minimal technology or specialized materials.

The EC and PreK teams will provide parents with:

- recommended activities and experiences targeted at certain skills
- novel prompts responsive to current conditions designed to encourage children and families to engage with their environment and setting;
- art and creative design ideas intended to provide children opportunities to process their experiences while developing cognitive, language and fine motor skills
- suggested enhancements to daily experiences to support holistic development.
- an opportunity for families to schedule 1x1 discussion time with the teacher

Suggested Timeframes for Learning	
Time per Day	**Subject Area**
20+ minutes	**Emergent Literacy Activities, Games & Challenges** focused on language development, vocabulary, comprehension, and phonological awareness.
20+ minutes	**Emergent Numeracy Activities, Games & Challenges** focused on counting, sorting, and patterning.
20+ minutes	**Holistically-Focused Activities, Games & Challenges** to support cognitive, physical, and social emotional development.
Flex Learning	Extended time offers opportunities to explore and develop new skills or pursue sustained or extended projects. • Learning new board game or skill • Practicing mindfulness/yoga/breathing exercises • Additional language acquisition • Exploring a new interest or passion

PRIMARY YEARS PROGRAMME

KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 4

After receiving initial notice from the Head of School about school closure and timelines, families will receive an email from their Lead Teacher with more specific information.

- The primary tools for communication between teachers and families will be Seesaw, email, and/or Google Classroom (G 3 & 4).
- Students will have both off- and on-screen learning activities designed to engage learners in experiences that connect to current curriculum.
- Learning tasks and activities will provide direction to families on how best to support student learning and the expected level of adult involvement. It is expected that students in grades K-2 will need higher levels of support than students in grades 3-4.
- Teachers will work with families to schedule time for 1x1 discussions

Suggested Timeframes for Learning	
Kindergarten – Grade 2	
Time per Day	**Subject Area**
20-25 minutes	**Reading/Writing**
20-25 minutes	**Mathematics**
20-25 minutes	**Unit Related (Science/Social Studies)**
20-25 minutes	**Additional language learning (Spanish & Mandarin)**
20-25 minutes	**Specialist Areas: Art, Music and PE teachers**

	will provide a range of activities
Flex Learning	**Reading aloud and independent reading: reading times are**
	K: 10 mins; G1: 10 mins; G2: 15 mins; G3: 20 mins; G4: 20 mins;
	Board games & challenges with math/strategy/critical thinking/project work

Suggested Timeframes for Learning	
Grade 3 – Grade 4	
Time per Day	**Subject Area**
25-30 minutes	**Reading (Science/Social Studies connections as appropriate)**
25-30 minutes	**Writing (Science/Social Studies connections as appropriate)**
25-30 minutes	**Mathematics**
25-30 minutes	**Science/Social Studies related experiences and/or integrated projects**
25-30 minutes	**Additional language learning (Spanish & Mandarin)**
25-30 minutes	**Specialist Areas: Art, Music and PE teachers will provide a range of activities**
Flex Learning	**Reading aloud and independent reading: reading times are**
	K: 10 mins; G1: 10 mins; G2: 15 mins; G3: 20 mins; G4: 20 mins;

	Board games & challenges with math/strategy/critical thinking/project work

MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME

GRADES 5-6

After receiving initial notice from the Head of School about school closure and timelines, families will receive an email from the MYP Coordinator with -specific information.

- The primary tools for communication between teachers and families will be GSuite and email.
- Teachers will either link materials linked in Google Classroom pages or share materials directly to each student's Google Drive.
- Distance learning for our early adolescent learners will focus on having a balanced, holistic learning experience. Students will have both off- and on-screen learning activities designed to engage the middle school learner.
- Learning experiences are designed to be completed independently or in collaboration with other students. Tutoring is not recommended, nor should a parent/guardian be too involved.
- Resources vary by class and lesson, but will include links to videos, graphic organizers or passages to complete, scanned materials to read and engage with, independent research material and reading materials
- Students are encouraged to be proactive in reaching out to teachers when they have questions or assignments are unclear.
- Teachers are always available to support students with academic, social, or emotional needs. Teachers will work with students and families to schedule time for 1x1 discussions

Suggested Timeframes for Learning	
45 mins per class (8 classes per day)	**Middle school classes**

Flex Learning
 	
• Independent & self-directed
• For the sake of learning
• No time limit/requirement
• Learning will be shared in advisory
	• Read for pleasure
	• Be active
	• Explore personal interests/passions
	• If safe...
	
	  - Explore local sights
	
	  - Seek out social interaction

Synchronous and asynchronous lessons and learning tasks	See individual class timetables