AISCT
AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF CAPE TOWN

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Dear AISCT Community,

AISCT is embarking on a virtual learning journey and the success of this endeavor is going to be determined by the strength of the partnership between our parent community, our teachers and our school administration. The aim of this letter is to help you prepare for the virtual learning plan (VLP).

As communicated by Dr. Jubert, we will launch our VLP on Wednesday, March 25. Teachers will prepare their online material and familiarise themselves with the required tools and platforms on Monday and Tuesday (March 23-24) so that they are ready to start teaching in the new paradigm on the 25th.

As parents, you may be wondering what you can do to prepare yourselves, your children, and your home for virtual schooling? You may also be unsure about the references to asynchronous and synchronous learning in our VLP, and in particular, how to prepare for these different modes.

Asynchronous learning happens on the student's schedule. The teacher provides materials for reading, lectures for viewing, and assignments for completing, and students can access and satisfy these requirements within a flexible time frame. Asynchronous online learning methods include self-guided lesson modules, streamed video content, virtual libraries, posted lecture notes, and exchanges across discussion boards or other education platforms such as Google Classroom.

Synchronous learning is the kind of learning that happens in real-time. This means that students, their classmates, and teachers interact in a specific virtual place, through a specific online medium, at a specific time. In other words, it's not anywhere, anyhow, anytime. Synchronous online learning methods include video conferencing, live chatting, and live-streaming of lectures.

Learning content will mostly be delivered asynchronously. However, the synchronous components even though logistically and technically more complicated, are also important. Online learning can sometimes be experienced as solitary, and synchronous connections reduce feelings of isolation. What's more, synchronous connections are valuable in planning tasks, troubleshooting issues, answering questions, and fostering space for discussions (when done in small groups).

Here is a short checklist of what you can do to prepare for virtual learning:

Internet access: Do you have sufficient internet bandwidth at home? For most purposes, a 4 Mbps Internet connection is sufficient. However, this can quickly become saturated if multiple people are streaming video and downloading content at the same time. Also, be aware that your upload speed may be far slower than your download speed and this will affect activities such as video conferencing, file uploads to Google Classroom, etc.

Electronic device: Does your child have a device to work on? This could be an iPad, a laptop, or a family computer. It is particularly important that middle and high school students have their own devices for synchronous learning components to take place at the same time. K2-G2 students do not need their own devices, but parents will need to be able to access digital content shared by teachers.

Apps/Software: Does your child have the essential apps/software installed? The VLP lists the essential apps that students need to have installed on their devices. Teachers will communicate with students directly if they require additional apps to be installed. Note that teachers will be intentional about the choice and number of apps and platforms to be used.

We also request that parents and students install the video conferencing app, Zoom Client for Meetings, before Wednesday.

Google Classroom: Most grades are already familiar with Google Classroom, so this will be the main platform through which teachers will share and collect work from students. Since elementary school parents may have to assist their students in using Google Classroom, we will share resources with you to make sure you are comfortable using this platform. We will also share your elementary school student's Google Classroom login details with you.

Ed-admin emails: Ed-admin, our school information system, sends emails from the communications@aisct.org address. Please add this address to your contacts so that school emails do not end up in your SPAM folder.

Load-shedding: Do you have contingency plans for load-shedding? While we have access to Cape Town's load-shedding schedule, we don't always know when load-shedding will be activated or what stage we will be in. It is, therefore, necessary to have back-up plans in place. For example, you might normally rely on your home fibre line for Internet access, but it might be prudent to have additional data available on a smartphone so that you can create a WiFi hotspot for Internet access.

FAQ: You undoubtedly have many more questions. We are populating a Virtual Learning & Readiness FAQ For Parents. This document will be continuously updated, so please check if your questions may not already have been answered.

As we increase our use of technology in the home environment, please be mindful of your child's online presence and behavior, and alert our school counselors immediately in any case of cyber-bullying. There is more than enough stress in this situation without us allowing our children to also being bullied.

We recognize that there will be many challenges and questions as we transition to remote learning. The staff, faculty, and administration at AISCT are committed to helping students and families navigate the preparations and transitions in these changing circumstances. Our Technology Team will also support you in any way we can. This is going to be a very busy period for our team, so please be patient with your requests. The Tech Team can be reached at techsupport@aisct.org.

In the global context of what we are experiencing, we also all need to realize that this transition is going to demand some sacrifices, creativity, empathy, and agility. During recent tests, some remote meetings were dropped and the Internet bandwidth decreased. It is clear that the worldwide move to remote working is straining infrastructures that have not yet scaled adequately. We have managed to make some local adjustments to achieve our goals, and will all have to continue making adjustments.

In a few days, we will email you and your students a brief survey to gain feedback and insights into our community's experience, and we will use this information to gauge where to focus our support efforts.

We greatly appreciate the patience and support that you have shown so far during this complex time of transition.

Sincerely,

Julian Saunders
Technology Director