Making the rapid switch to online learning

International schools can sometimes face temporary closures due to health, political or environmental reasons. Ideally these plans are established and communicated well before a closure occurs, however, in reality many schools lack the time and resources to create such a plan.

Below are some steps you can take right now to assist with the process. It's important to realise school closure can often be a stressful experience for students and adults alike. Be cognisant of this and take any opportunity to be supportive and flexible.

1. **Communicate as early as possible**

Prepare a brief message that outlines the details of the closure to your school community. Typically this can be delivered by email, placed on the school website, online learning platforms, SMS, messaging groups or even via a traditional phone tree. It could include:

- Rationale for closure
- Expected duration
- Time frame for next communication
- A key contact for any questions

2. Establish clear expectations

Operating in an online or asynchronous manner can raise many questions for students, parents and educators (which can differ across PK-12). Here are some simple but malleable guidelines:

- Teachers, admin and the school IT support should be available during normal working hours
- Student classes take place at their scheduled times with flexibility for differing timezones
- Recognise that early years and lower elementary students will need more time and flexibility as parents/caregivers may have limited availability

You may also need to make additional decisions regarding student and staff locations during closure. For example, deciding if staff can be off campus or even out of country. Many of these rules may be contingent on outside influences so keep communication channels open with local authorities and embassies.

3. Identify a platform for online learning.

With the assumption that electricity and internet access are still available, email can be the simplest way to maintain operations. Simple guidelines can be sent to students and parents each day with activities or tasks to be completed.

Give the community as much lead time as possible before commencing online classes. This provides parents with the necessary time to review expectations and assist if needed.

Want to step the collaboration up a notch with nearly zero setup? Check out www.padlet.com. Teachers can easily create separate spaces for each class to post activities, ideas and resources.

Of course many schools these days already have access to online learning platforms that can be leveraged during potential closures. Google Classroom and Edmodo are commonly used, free, and relatively easy to roll out.

4. Maintain regular contact

To quote Fullan, "Communication during implementation is far more important than communication prior to implementation"

It's critical to keep connected in a regular and consistent fashion. This could include, but is not limited to:
- Regular messages from administration regarding updates on closure and status of online learning
- An email group for staff to connect, check in and share resources
- Easily accessible IT support

All of this can be conducted via email groups or any of the platforms listed above. The key is to keep everyone in the loop. If the closure is ongoing, it's also wise to connect with your relevant accreditation authority (think IB or AP) to let them know if students or examinations will be affected.

5. Go with the flow

Don't sweat the small stuff. Expect timetabling conflicts, downtime in responses, and anxiety regarding the closure, particularly in the early days. Listen to the concerns of community and practice impressive empathy wherever possible.

Encourage students and educators to explore their passions, share their favourite books, movies and games. And if you're a leader, remember you're not alone, there is always an international community of educators here to support you.