

COVID-19, impact on HIS Operations – FAQ

Dear HIS Community,

As we near the end of week 5 in lockdown, although we do not have firm answers about what the future may look, I would like to share some of our thinking at HIS as we look ahead. Below are some questions that we've been asking ourselves, and think our community is thinking about, too.

FAQs

How is HIS planning?

In all of our planning, HIS is keeping true to its mission statement, looking towards a future, both near and long-term, where we can design it in the most intelligent and creative way in order to have a positive impact on our students.

The Senior Leadership Team, Senior Admin Team, and our Nurse are developing a range of scenarios as we look to the future. Our Board of Governors as well as other international schools in our region have been excellent sources of insight and support. Scenario planning is, in effect, dealing with functional ambiguity and managing uncertainty. Among the numerous scenarios, it is likely that none of them will be completely true, but that some parts of them will reflect our reality. Scenario planning is taking place through a three-pronged approach:

- **Protecting Health & Wellbeing**
- **Maintaining our excellent, international, IB Education, and**
- **Sound and Responsible Financial Planning.**

It is through the lens of these three areas that the questions are categorized, understanding they are all very much interconnected.

Protecting Health & Well-being:

Q1. When will campus reopen?

We can confirm that campus will **not** reopen for “normal school” through to the end of the school year. As we wait for information about whether or not the lockdown will continue from next week, and how the actual situation in regards to COVID-19 develops in the country, we are **considering** scenarios under which some grade levels **may** be able to access campus on a very modified schedule and with strict access protocols. This health and safety of our students and staff is first and foremost in our minds and will be the most important criterion for our decision-making, in consultation with Nurse Carol and the local Centre for Disease Control.

Q2. How is HIS taking care of the wellbeing of our community?

Wellbeing is the starting point for every conversation. Wellbeing is the foundational driving factor that underpins our communications at meetings and in our written communication with students and colleagues alike. I hope that you have found this to be equally true as parents. For every decision that we grapple

with, from reopening campus to at-a-distance-learning adjustments, from support for families who may no longer be in Harare to on-line meetings – every *interaction*, we ask ourselves how we can support wellbeing. Our Counselors play an important role in supporting our community; however, everyone needs to be part of this culture of care and understanding. Our Wellbeing Committee has launched some positive initiatives to help share good news in the community – I hope that you will join in these efforts. Please watch the weekly bulletin for other news in wellbeing and community building.

Maintaining our excellent, international, IB Education

Q1. What guides decisions about learning and the impact of at-a-distance-learning?

We remain committed to our Mission statement and our new Strategic Priorities. In this true test, we have found that these guiding statements have not only remained relevant, but have taken on more importance and urgency in the face of this world crisis. We will be inviting community members to consider positive opportunities that may emerge from these difficult times. If you are interested in being part of such a team, please [email](#) me.

Q2. Overall, how are we doing in at-a-distance-learning at HIS?

Any significant change in approaches to and modes of learning requires a period of adjustment. In terms of learning, we still see a high degree of commitment and engagement by our students and parents, for whom this has been a steep learning curve, particularly among our youngest learners. Your feedback to us is extremely important as we continue to refine teaching and learning at-a-distance. The feedback in the student and parent surveys was extremely helpful, and in our upcoming annual community survey we have added a number of questions to further guide our practices. Additionally, class student feedback has been sought by every teacher in Grades 6-12, and we will seek further feedback from students over the next few weeks in Grades 3-11. Please do not wait to be asked for feedback! If you have something to share, be it positive or constructive, please send an email or give one of us a call!

Q3. What impact does at-a-distance-learning have on university and college admissions?

It is reassuring to know that universities and colleges are being extremely flexible and open-minded during the crisis. Universities and colleges are finding new and better ways to admit students into their institutions focusing on a better fit and not just high-stakes standardized testing. Currently, our graduating class of 2020 has received a total of 108 offers and 40 scholarships, and nearly 70% of our student have *accepted* an offer and secured their place at their best-fit higher education institute. For years, schools and universities have been reluctant to “try out” new approaches to admissions, and now they are forced to do so. This could be transformational in the most positive sense.

Q3. Where are all of our HIS teachers?

The majority of our HIS teachers have remained in Harare, with 7 returning to their home country for various reasons. All of these teachers continue with at-a-distance-learning, and are committed to an ongoing positive learning experience for our students, demonstrating a high degree of flexibility and agility.

Q4. What is happening with our new teachers who are meant to join us in August?

Recruitment was nearly completed prior to the pandemic. We have appointed 10 of 11 teachers, 6 of whom are internal appointments. We expect for new teachers to join us either on campus or virtually in August depending on the situation in the world and in our region at that time. We remain in regular contact with them.

Financial Planning

Q1. What are the enrollment predictions for next year?

Even in the best times it is difficult to predict enrollment numbers in Harare at HIS. At a time of crisis this is even more difficult and so we appreciate the 91% of families who have completed reenrollment process. If you have not yet responded, please do so **today**, even if it's simply to indicate that you are undecided. We understand that no one really knows what's going to happen in a few months time. Right now, according to our worst-case scenario, we may expect a 40% reduction in whole school enrollment.

Q2. How would we weather a 40% decrease in enrollment?

As you know, as of July 2019, we are no longer in debt. Additionally last year we were able to put aside the minimum amount of 5% of operating costs into reserves and we have budgeted the same amount for the current school year. As a result we will be able to access these funds to continue to support the school through this difficult time.

Q3. Does HIS plan to cut salaries?

No, we have no plans to cut salaries at this time. We are confident that our salary scale for teachers ensures that we are competitive in our region, and that other non-faculty salaries are fair and allow us to keep the most suitable employees.

Q4. With a significant decrease anticipated in enrollment, does the School plan to reduce teaching staff?

According to our worst-case scenario, which reflects a 40% reduction in student enrollment and a possible closed campus in August, we have had to plan for a relatively small reduction in teaching positions. In this scenario, we have deliberately included planned agility, meaning that with a higher enrollment, we would be able to meet these students' needs. At the same time, we have also planned for a reduction in non-teaching staff in some areas. These decisions are very difficult. Equally, we must make these decisions to ensure the financial viability of the school.

Q5. Are there significant savings due to the campus closure?

Savings due to campus closure are extremely minimal. Our most significant costs are related to human resources. There are a few areas where we are able to make some savings, such as fuel and cleaning supplies.

Q6. What are additional expenses due to the campus closure?

Additional expenses have also been minimal. This includes providing pre-paid 25G SIM cards for local teachers and TAs who may not have Internet at home. This allows them to continue to provide at-a-distance learning while campus is closed.

Some closing thoughts

What can you expect moving forward?

As HIS community members, you can continue to expect regular communication with updates as we move ahead. Our communications approach means that the first stage of communication will always be to our teachers and staff. The next level of communication is to our parents and to our students, as relevant. We are also reaching out to our alumni, as we believe that they also have a vested interest in how we are adjusting to the current pandemic and the future of HIS.

You can expect us to share our thinking, and we hope that you understand that during these times it's hard to really know what will happen in the next several months. We thank you for your patience.

Equally important, you can expect that HIS will be thought and learning leaders as we look to the future.

It is a source of pride to be the Director at HIS, where we live our Mission statement on a daily basis, grappling with how to make the best decisions to ensure health and wellbeing, excellent international education, and financial viability.

Sincerely,
Arden Tyoschin
Director