

There's No Overstating This Challenge

TIE Editor Meadow Dibble interviews Edward E. Greene, Executive Director of the East Asia Regional Council of Schools (EARCOS), who describes the impact of the coronavirus on international school communities throughout his region. Because the rapidly evolving situation varies from one country to another and from school to school, Ed Greene shares his perspective while insisting this is merely a snapshot.

Meadow Dibble: Do you have a sense of how many international schools—and by extension, how many students and teachers—in your region have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic?

Ed Greene: There are over 185 EARCOS member schools. It is safe to say that all have been impacted one way or another. Student trips, athletic competitions, and profes-



A few rare schools in East Asia have remained open. Here, administrators at Singapore American School help to ensure that no one comes to school sick and carefully keep track of students' health details (photo: SAS).

sional development events have all been curtailed or cancelled entirely. One example serves to highlight the severity of the situation in terms of program impact: the Asia Pacific Athletic Conference (APAC) has 12 member schools; of those ... *continued on p. 2*

YueCheng Pilots a New Kind of Education for China



The YueCheng Kindergarten Approach features intergenerational learning with senior citizens from the local community, translanguaging in Chinese and English, and other novel programs (photo: YueCheng).

By Nick Bowley

In 2005, a successful Chinese businessman opened a school in Beijing. There may seem nothing unusual about that, but indeed there was. For this was a Chinese school that invited national and ... *continued on p. 6*

Moving from an Industrial to a Postindustrial Model

By Julie Wilson

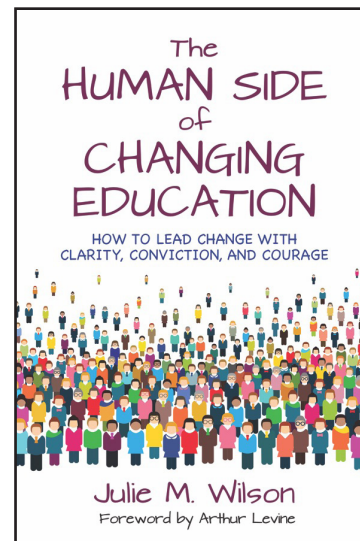
When I first embarked on this work, I was in search of an airtight model for change—a model I could bring to any community and say, “Here is the model that will help your school get from here to there—here are the guaranteed outcomes of using this model.”

I researched; I read; I constructed logic model after logic model—convinced the answer was out there. The irony of what I was doing dawned on me gradually. By searching for THE model, I was still keeping myself bound by industrial-model thinking. I discovered there is no single model out there that is THE model for school change. There is no model you can take off the shelf and implement with 100 percent fidelity. It is back to us being messy human beings and the fact that schools are not all the same in terms of both starting and end points in the change process.

Changing a system is one of the most challenging things to do. If we are saying that we want to support more creativity, col-

laboration, and appetite for risk in schools, then the organizational structure, systems, and processes must change—and change significantly—in order to support and reflect that pedagogy.

And those changes fly in the face of how a school is typically structured. The majority of school structures take the form of the industrial-era hierarchy, where decision making is consolidated ... *continued on p. 2*



Coping with the Coronavirus in China

“What we know changes daily.”

By Tom Ulmet

Executive Director of the Association of China and Mongolia International Schools (ACAMIS)

On 31 January, the world looked on with amazement as China announced it was taking massive measures to protect the country from the rapid spread of the newly identified novel coronavirus, now officially classified by the World Health Organization as COVID-19. When the speed of transmission resulted in long lines at medical centers and rising fatality rates, Hong Kong and Macao quickly followed suit.

These unprecedented emergency measures were implemented during one of the largest annual mass migrations in China—the Chinese Lunar New Year holiday, which occurs over a 15-day timeframe in January and prompts many Chinese to return home to visit with family. This year, experts predicted the occasion would at-

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Demand for International Education in South-eastern Asia Increases

By Anne Keeling, ISC Research

South-eastern Asia is now one of the leading subregions in the world for international education. According to ISC Research data from January 2020, which takes into consideration new school openings and school enrolments for the current academic year, the subregion has 1,516 English-medium international schools with over half a million (557,000) students currently enrolled. This makes South-eastern Asia the third largest subregion in the world for the number of international schools (behind Western Asia and Eastern Asia), and the fourth largest subregion in the world for the number of students attending the schools. ... *continued on p. 6*

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Virtual Learning: Advice for Teaching Parents

Virtual Learning: Advice for Teaching Parents

By Stan Covington

The quote above sums up the challenges that international educators around the world suddenly find themselves facing as learning moves online. Some, like myself, are just getting started, while others have been at it for weeks.

Here are some tips from teacher-parents working virtually in all regions of the world while trying to help their own children learn remotely and maintain balance.

1. *“Routine is key for us, it has gotten easier as time passes, but it is still exhausting.”*

— Joanne Alexander

Set a routine and establish a working space for your kids. Make a schedule with breaks that include no screens and lots of time outdoors.

2. *“Choose the hardest thing first when someone can help or support.”*

— Erica Holte Ford

For our youngest, this is writing!

3. *“Give yourself some grace.”*

— Everett Hill

You may not have time to get everything done. It's like a potluck dinner, everybody is bringing something, and there will be too much food. Kids are going to lose it at some point, especially with changing routines. The work can wait.

4. *“A happy family equals happy dad and mom, equals better work.”*

— Chay Ly Cheng

5. *“We do take a lot of turns.”*

— Erica Holte Ford

Friends, family, or older siblings can be helpers, managing physical exercise, break time, perhaps language lessons, and art time.

6. *“School co-op.”*

— Anastasia Filippova

It takes a village. Set up study groups, playgroups, and breaks with friends—virtual or face-to-face. Reach out for help.

7. *“Set boundaries just as you would in the classroom, establishing when you can be available and when you can't.”*

— Beverley Caddington

This helps to establish routines for you, your family, and your students. Routines can be comforting in times of intense changes!

8. *“If they are young it won't hurt them to miss.”*

— Rory Burnham Pickett

Perspective is important. I've enjoyed being able to spend more

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Pursuing In-Person Learning in the Time of Coronavirus

By Tom Boasberg, Superintendent
Singapore American School

It was just before Chinese New Year and we could feel the excitement building, both at Singapore American School (SAS) and across our island home. Elementary classes visited Chinatown, staff performed a Lunar New Year concert, and families planned for the upcoming four-day weekend. Some would relax on-island, some would explore the region, and some would hold traditional family reunions in Singapore or China.

Unfortunately, another traveler was on the move. The novel coronavirus later named COVID-19 had quietly arrived in Singapore, and on the Friday starting our long weekend, the government announced that three people in Singapore had been diagnosed with it. We were quickly confronted with a highly uncertain, fast-moving situation that has affected many aspects of our school and personal lives. Over the next few weeks, we sought to learn about the virus, implement measures to prevent its spread, meet government requirements, and humanely manage the implications for students, staff, and families.

We have seen how frequent, open, and values-based school communication can encourage individuals to take steps for their own safety and for the greater good. We have also seen how fear and panic can compound the threat of the virus itself.

Now, well into the process, we are grateful for how our school family has pulled together in the face of uncertainty and unease. As the virus continues its march around the globe, our experiences may help other schools as they grapple with how to respond in the best way for their situations and communities.

Be prepared

Having gone through the SARS epidemic in 2003, SAS had already experienced a health crisis that caused widespread anxiety and disruption to daily life. We had kept our emergency-response plans updated through annual reviews, and we had developed plans for remote learning in case of an unexpected campus shutdown.

In recent weeks, we have shared those distance-learning plans with our community, and students and teachers practiced how it would work. This has reassured the community that we are all prepared for a possible campus closure.

Luckily for us, the Singapore government had also built on the SARS experience to create a response framework that was quickly mobilized, including clear guidelines for schools. We com-



Taking temperatures at SAS's pedestrian gate, administrators ensure that no one comes to school sick (photo: SAS).

municated those guidelines to our community and followed them carefully. Where we felt it necessary, we took precautions beyond those required by the government and took pains to explain them to our community.

First steps

On the afternoon of the government's initial announcement, we emailed our community that we would communicate detailed safety precautions on the last day of the holiday weekend. We wanted to fill the news vacuum immediately to prevent speculation and reassure parents that we would take precautionary actions before school resumed.

The day before our Tuesday start, we sent out a detailed communication to our community. We sought to both establish clear policies and demonstrate concrete actions. For example, we announced that we would hire extra nurses and cleaning staff to bolster critical front-line resources. We asked parents to be our partners by taking their children's temperature every morning and reporting on travel. Our leadership team activated the school safety committee and established clear information-sharing and decision-making procedures.

Communicate, communicate, communicate

Throughout the evolution of our protocols, we communicated with parents and staff frequently to stay ahead of concerns and questions and nip rumors in the bud.

In the month after Chinese New Year break, we emailed 17 separate letters to our community, along with Chinese, Japanese, and Korean translations of the most important ones. We also created a single micro-site for easy access to all the relevant information, including past communications.

Open communication was especially important when we were

informed that visiting relatives of a staff member had tested positive for the virus. We shared promptly and fully with the community what was known, what was being done, and what was (and was not) likely to happen next. We continued with frequent, often daily updates on the situation that emphasized our heartfelt support for our quarantined staff member and his family.

Of course, there was fear in our community, but we were determined to prevent any expression of anger or bias towards that educator or other faculty. Thankfully, our staff member completed his mandatory quarantine without becoming ill, and his relatives fully recovered. Students sent him their best wishes during his absence, and we publicly welcomed him back to campus on his return.

Allow for an evolving situation

As the situation in Singapore developed, with more cases confirmed and the number of at-risk individuals growing, the government's instructions became increasingly specific and strict.

At school, we implemented online, twice-daily temperature recording for staff and instructed parents to fill out a daily temperature slip for each child. Parents and staff had to document recent travel to China or elsewhere.

We cancelled scheduled high school trips to China, and then a week later we cancelled our entire Interim Semester, a weeklong, off-campus learning program that has been a high point for our high school students since 1973. We next moved to limit large-group activities, cancel inter-school events, and institute staggered recesses and lunchtimes to reduce crowding.

Visitors, including taxis, were no longer allowed on campus, and students took extra practice on our remote learning platforms. Throughout it all, we sought to teach our children lifelong skills, like proper

hand washing, and incorporated relevant lessons into courses ranging from biology to social studies. We wanted to demystify the virus and give our community the sense that this was something we could confront together.

Involve the community when possible

Before making major, potentially unpopular decisions—such as cancelling Interim Semester, sports tournaments, or our annual PTA International Fest—we consulted with community members and addressed their concerns. We tried to respond to complaints and objections with respect, empathy, and, above all, facts, on the theory that understanding why we had to make certain decisions would help people accept them.

We spent hours detailing the reasons behind our decisions, rather than simply stating that they were in the best interests of students. We believe this approach worked, because our students, staff, and parents consistently rose to the occasion and put community safety before their own preferences. Together, we could recognize that this exceptional situation required an exceptional response.

Keep the focus on learning and community

We feel we have come a long way since the start of our COVID-19 experience, and we know there will be more developments in the weeks ahead. We hope to be prepared but are painfully aware of how quickly this situation has developed and the unforeseen complications we will undoubtedly face.

In the meantime, we have tried to keep the focus on learning and on community. We hope that in the future, our students will look back on this as a unique episode during which, despite the challenges, school continued to be the place where they felt safe, learned new things, and deepened their friendships with fellow students. ●

Tom Boasberg became Superintendent of Singapore American School in July 2019.

