

Shanghai: The situation has evolved quickly and for the worse in Shanghai. For almost three weeks, the city has been under the harshest lockdown seen since Wuhan in 2020, and it has had a great impact on the community. No one is allowed to leave their homes, 24/7, to the point where the most essential needs (food, water, medication) are not being met. We went from worrying about the balance between synchronous and asynchronous to finding out how to receive municipal licenses to run buses allowing us to deliver care packages to our 650 employees. Some of our teachers have been eating only potatoes and rice for over a week before receiving their box.

On Tuesday, the US consulate ordered its non-essential staff and all consulate families to depart. On Friday, the Board voted a motion to support the administration's recommendation to declare Distance Learning until the end of the academic year, allowing us to plan for the best education possible in this very challenging context, and also de facto allowing faculty and staff who desire to depart and teach from a distance to do so. We already had a dozen teachers departing from China this week, with probably more to come. Despite the fact that these faculty members will be able to support Distance Learning from a distance, this news creates considerable anxiety in the community, especially a fear of teachers not being able to return over the summer. Not counting the cancellation of IB exams, there is a very high probability of being unable to host AP exams and so forth.

Shekou: Schools in China do continue to be swept along in the muddy water that is the pandemic. While we look outside China's borders and see the restrictions being lifted and life returning to normal, our own situation is becoming more restricted in many cases. For expatriate families the challenge of living in a foreign country is being exacerbated by the diminishing chance of travel home in the foreseeable future.

Most cities have had some form of limit on travel or movement or access for some months, and schools have transferred in and out of online delivery. We share our current situation and empathize with colleagues and can do little else. The current situation with Shanghai is the most serious/least serious outbreak seen yet. Tens of thousands of cases and huge disruption to routines and living, but almost no cases of serious illness.

The recent action in Shanghai has been disturbing for many expats and there is more talk about leaving than before, which is worrying given the obstacles to bringing teachers into China with our quarantine and visa regimes. Not to mention that the number of flights into China is around 2% of pre covid times. It is often said that business hates uncertainty. I can say with confidence that no one is liking the uncertainty of how we can exit the covid times and move to a post pandemic world.

We have an amazingly resilient group of people here in China, but the reserves are running low for many people.

Hong Kong: Though our journey in Hong Kong has been quite tumultuous and we may be headed for our roughest waters yet very shortly, I would never compare it to what our friends and colleagues in Ukraine have been through. At this point, if the reports are true, we are not in a situation that compares to what is happening in Shanghai either. We will continue to offer our thoughts and prayers for all of them.

What I can report about Hong Kong, as an overview, is:

- Due to the uptick of COVID-19 in Hong Kong back in January, all schools were ordered to move to online learning by January 14.
- Initially, there was an announcement that all schools would have to move their summer breaks into March and April, then extend the school year until August 12th.
 - International/Independent School Heads were able to set a meeting with the Deputy Secretary of the Education Bureau to voice the many concerns we had. This opportunity to voice our concerns was very much appreciated. In short, the concerns were...
 - Teachers contracts end before August 12th - Who would take their classes?
 - New teachers needed to be onboarded and orientations needed to be held for the following year. Some schools start about the same time the school year would be ending.
 - Students and families in our communities had already made plans to leave Hong Kong or go on holiday at the end of the school year, as scheduled.
 - What would this mean for admissions, finance, etc?
 - Maybe most importantly, what about student and staff well-being?
 - Local schools and their families were not happy about this "special treatment".
- Ultimately, we did not have to move our summer, which was greatly appreciated.
- Though my school does not have a Secondary school, the issue of exams has been a hot topic. I am still not quite sure if or what the resolution has been. I do believe that it was being suggested that kids who had COVID could still sit for the exams in certain situations, and that arrangements were being made to try to find invigilators for these circumstances.
 - The conversation of whether to cancel them or to press forward was definitely a spirited one among students, admin, and communities.
- As Spring Break approached, it was reported the government was pushing to open schools after the break (The break ends Tuesday, April 19th - aka, tomorrow).
- Anxiety levels among school leaders and communities rose as there was talk of a 90% threshold in the media, apparently based on statements from government officials, to bring students back on campus.
 - Seeing that kids between 3 and 11 years old only became eligible for vaccination recently, and those who had had COVID couldn't be vaccinated for 90 days,

the writing was on the wall - there was very little chance KG and elementary schools would be allowed back for full days if the 90% threshold was upheld.

- Heads were also concerned about...
 - What if many students in a class, grade level or many teachers test positive?
 - Would the school report names to the Government, which could result in quarantine?
 - Would whole classes of students be put in quarantine, as had reportedly happened previously?
 - Would kids be separated from their families?
- A letter was sent to the Education Bureau with the signatures of many school Heads regarding some of these issues
 - International/Independent School Heads were then invited to an online meeting with Hong Kong Chief Executive, Carrie Lam.
 - The CE was receptive to many questions from the group over the course of a few hours or so.
 - Ultimately, the 90% vaccination rule was not something international / independent schools had to adhere to.
 - Many of the answers to the questions were not directly responded to, such as, "...quarantine decisions could only ultimately be made by the Center for Health Protection (CHP)".
 - We were referred to several government websites that held COVID information, including who was and wasn't a close contact and who would be sent to quarantine.
- On April 11, schools received guidelines stating, overall, that...
 - Primary and Secondary schools could return to face-to-face learning on Tuesday, April 19th.
 - KG could only come back in phases, starting May 3rd, May 10th, and May 16th.
 - The families of KG students at my school are furious about this.
 - All students and staff would have to take daily RATs prior to coming to school.
 - Results of those who test positive must be reported to the school as soon as possible and to the CHP within 24 hours.
 - Consideration for full-day, face-to-face learning would be available to those who had already had a full-day plan approved (Fortunately, our school did!). All others would be on a half-day schedule, or they could submit a proposal.
 - The reason for sticking to half-days is that students will have to take off their masks at lunch to eat, hence increasing the chances of spreading the virus.

So, that's about it for now. I know I've left plenty out, but we head back tomorrow and we'll see how it goes. We have an adjusted online schedule for tomorrow so staff can reconnect and so we can offer updates and take questions in person. I know so many have been through this stage before us and they've gotten through it. I'm sure we will too! How well still remains to be

seen, but I'm certain it will depend greatly on the level of patience, empathy and understanding we can offer our community. Flexibility will play a huge role too.

Northern China: As the rest of the world moves on from the pandemic, China is continuing to maintain a “dynamic zero-Covid” policy. As its name suggests, the goal is to eliminate all cases of Covid within China’s borders. For the most part, the country successfully achieved this goal... until the more contagious Omicron strain and its sub-variants entered China. Surprisingly, even with the highly transmittable variant, most parts of China have still been able to control the outbreak, with one notable exception.

If a city or region is Covid-free (or is able to keep the number relatively low), its residents enjoy a relatively “normal” existence. Schools, restaurants, theaters, swimming pools, gyms, museums and libraries are open, and people are able to move freely. For the most part, we have had the luxury of few to no cases in our area. This has meant that save for a couple of weeks here and there, we have been able to continue with in-person learning. Most amenities, including restaurants, have mostly stayed open since Covid hit. By keeping a watchful eye on any medium or high-risk areas that may pop up, many of us have even enjoyed a number of domestic holidays over the past two years.

However, when a flare-up occurs, local authorities swiftly implement lock downs and contact tracing while conducting massive, repeated testing until the outbreak is brought under control. We are experiencing a small outbreak in our area (a handful of cases a day). As a result, we are being tested regularly (10 tests in the last 3 weeks), school has gone online, but otherwise we are free to leave our homes and campus. We hope to be back in class in the next couple of weeks (fingers crossed!).

In the case of the larger outbreak in Shanghai, most of its 26 million residents have been locked down in their apartments since the end of March. We are hearing reports of food shortages, inaccessibility to regular medical services, and growing anxiety and hostility towards government officials over the restrictive policies. Perhaps most frightening, particularly for the expat population, is the possibility of testing positive for Covid and being placed in centralized government quarantine for up to three weeks. All positive cases, even asymptomatic ones, must convalesce in a government run facility. Many of these make-shift hospitals are overcrowded, understaffed, and unsanitary. For parents, the fear is even greater as some jurisdictions will not allow a Covid-negative parent to accompany a Covid-positive child to quarantine, regardless of the child’s age. We have contacted our local officials on this point to get assurances from them that our teachers with children will be able to stay with a sick child. Their response was that they would “consider” our request but would not guarantee it. As you can imagine, these circumstances have shaken the expat population living in China. Many teachers have not left the country since the summer of 2019 due to the extreme border control policies implemented by the Chinese and the skyrocketing price of flights. With the ever-present threat of a Shanghai-style lockdown, the situation is becoming untenable. When put all together, it is not surprising that many expats, including teachers, are leaving China at an alarming rate. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get teachers into the country and the pool of teachers willing to stay in China is getting smaller and smaller. At the same

time, the expat student populations are dwindling due to the exodus of families no longer willing to risk lockdowns or family separation in the event of a positive Covid test. It may take international schools located in China some time to recover from the impact of the pandemic. Like I said earlier, it would be good for you to reach out to some other heads that have been in the thick of some of the worst lockdowns – Shenzhen, Tianjin, and of course Shanghai. I can only pass along what I am hearing from friends and colleagues that are in those cities. I do not want to imply that I understand or can articulate their plight.