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## Online Learning and School Resumption



# Challenges and Insights for Online Learning and School Resumption

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# Online Learning and School Resumption



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As coronavirus continues to rage on, many countries are seeing school closures to various degrees. In many cases educational institutions have elected to take the learning process online. MWYO—an independent think tank that focuses on youth issues in Hong Kong—invites secondary school teachers and principals from Hong Kong, where school has been suspended since late January, to share their insights on online learning and school resumption.

# Problems Faced by Students



“The school will lend laptops to students who do not have computers at home. Teachers will also provide clear and simple instructions that enable students to download learning materials with a smartphone.”

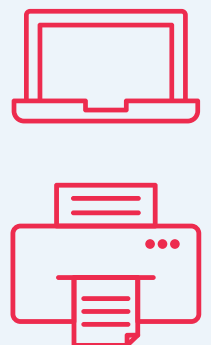
Senior Teacher

## 01 Provide Equipment for Online Learning

Students, especially those from grassroots families or those who need to share a device with siblings, may not have the equipment (e.g. laptops and printers) required to support online learning. In some cases, students may not have regular access to internet.

### Insight

Schools, alumni, and NGOs should provide laptops or other electronic devices for needy students to borrow. Telecommunications companies can also provide students with prepaid SIM cards that allow internet access. Companies and channels can make learning materials available for free online.



# Problems Faced by Students



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Our teachers contact parents every 7 to 14 days to check-up on their students, making sure that they are coping with schoolwork, resting well, and are mentally healthy. Teachers may contact social workers if a student requires mental support.”

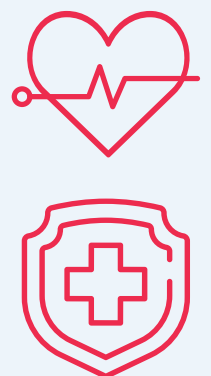
Senior Teacher

## 02 Maintain Mindfulness and Physical Wellbeing

Long periods of coronavirus-enforced social isolation may impact adversely on students' mental health as social activities are cancelled and cabin fever begins to build. The lack of physical activity due to quarantine is bad for students' physical fitness.

### Insight

Check-in with students regularly to ensure that they are able to cope with the demands of online learning and are not suffering from mental strains of quarantine. Contact professionals about the psychological health of students if required. Teachers can also devote some online teaching time to lead exercise with students and remind them of the importance of a healthy lifestyle.



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In terms of academic and career guidance, our teachers are in contact with students through live online sessions.”

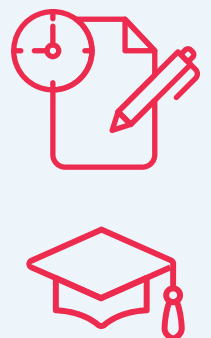
Principal

## 03 Stay Tuned for Public Exams

School closures hamper students' ability to prepare for public exams. Public exams may also be cancelled and might adversely impact on students' academic and career prospects.

### Insight

Set up online study groups, organise online mock exams, and provide study and career guidance for students through different channels. Exam boards can also establish a mechanism where public exam results can be decided based on the internal exam results of students.



“We have started training teachers for online teaching since the end of Chinese New Year vacation (late January). This training is carried out in segments, with the first batch of trained teachers sharing their knowledge and experience with their colleagues... We have also designed easy-to-use equipment to facilitate online teaching.”

Senior Teacher

## 01 Facilitate Resource Provision and Co-sharing

Teachers are unfamiliar with teaching online, hence need help in using the platforms and devices required for online teaching. In particular, most of them have little experience in creating e-learning-friendly teaching materials or in marking homework online.

### Insight

Develop equipment that is compatible with teachers' technological knowledge level. Encourage collaboration (e.g. combining classes) and resource/skill pooling among teachers and schools. Provide technical support by both having an IT support team in place and producing How-to videos that help teachers familiarise themselves with online teaching software. Equally important is the facilitation of teachers to practise online teaching beforehand.



“Students can mute their microphones and turn off their cameras, but teachers cannot. Even if a teacher’s home is unsuited for online teaching, he/she has no other choice [but to do it].”

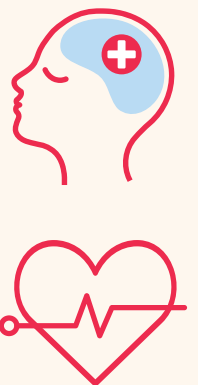
Teacher

## 02 Break the Psychological Barrier

Teachers may feel uncomfortable with the idea of teaching online where lessons may be monitored by parents, unknowingly recorded and put on the web. Class discipline is more difficult to maintain, and teachers are unable to assess the response, attendance, and progress of students. Students may even simply mute their microphones and turn off the video cameras.

### Insight

Consider alternatives to livestreaming (e.g. pre-recorded lessons) or speaking in front of the camera. Instead the camera can be focused on the teaching materials, with the teacher serving as an off-screen narrator. Teachers can also take attendance of online lessons by noting the names of students present and follow up absences with phone calls.



“The management should not force teachers to use different online teaching platforms without first assessing their [the platforms’] suitability and restrictions. They should also take on the responsibility of communicating with parents instead of leaving it to teachers.”

Teacher

## 03 Avoid Burning out the Teachers

Online teaching is more time consuming than most people, including parents, would imagine. Teachers may need more time to reply messages from parents concerned about the academic progress of their children during school closures or how to manage their children. Teachers may find their workload increased if they are expected to follow up on every instance of students not showing up for online lessons.

### Insight

Avoid overburdening teachers by reducing their administrative tasks. Schools can also relieve the pressure of teachers by helping out with tasks such as aligning expectations with parents. Introduce a mechanism of dealing with student absences that minimises the time teachers need to spend on following up.





# Problems when Planning School Resumption



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The vast majority of parents are supportive of the school's online learning strategy, though there have been cases where parents, in fear of their children being out-competed, made unrealistic demands [on teachers] such as a full day of lessons.”

Senior Teacher

## 01 Manage the Parents

Some parents may find learning at home too aggressive as they are unable to teach their kids. Others may worry that the learning progress is too slow and their children will not be able to catch up once school restarts. They may also be concerned about the measures schools will take to protect their children when school resumes.

### Insight

Announce plans to resume school in advance so that parents and students can take precautionary measures and mentally prepare themselves. Be transparent on plans to make up for lost time, especially if those plans include delaying summer vacation or arranging extra lessons on weekends. Schools can also prioritise the needs of students facing public exams by organising a staggered school resumption and resume lessons for that particular cohort first.



# Problems when Planning School Resumption



We hope the government could lay out plans to help schools procure antiviral materials. We have heard that there will be over 10 local suppliers of face masks, so we would appreciate it if the government could clarify how many of those will be able to supply masks to the education sector.”

Senior Teacher

## 02 Gear up for School Resumption

Schools may be unable to source enough antiviral materials (especially face masks) for students and staff. Schools will likely be unable to procure antiviral materials even if there are funds to do so, as the global shortage is likely to continue for some time.

### Insight

Work closely with local government, and NGOs to find suppliers. The government can also compile and distribute a dossier of antiviral materials suppliers and assist schools in contacting them. Schools can also attempt to produce some of the antiviral materials (e.g. hand sanitizers) themselves.



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As normal life continues to be upended, and people adapt to the new realities of social isolation, it is important to remember that unconventional times warrant unconventional measures. We all need to be creative and flexible if we are to get through this. Expect the unexpected, think out of the box and do not give up hope. Remember, this too shall pass.

**End**