

## A Letter from HTA Principal about Distance Learning

Dear Parents,

On Monday, April 6 we will start a new journey together with your children: transitioning, temporarily, to a distance learning school. We assume that schools in Kazakhstan will be in distance learning mode until at least May 22, so this will be our “new normal” for the foreseeable future.

This is not something we planned for (until recently), nor what any of us would voluntarily choose to do. But I can tell you that I am extraordinarily proud of the incredible work and flexibility demonstrated by the HTA faculty and staff as we learn, how to stay connected while learning online. I can not make the case that HTA's preferred, project based method of delivering education can be ideal in this new reality. I can assure you, however, that we will all do the best we can, given the circumstances. HTA is built on the idea of innovative approaches to education and we will apply that same mindset to remote teaching and learning.

Before we officially launch this new distance learning reality, I want to share with you some helpful guidelines, update you about how we will assess and grade students, and also share with you the expectations I have for the faculty and what their goals should be for your child.

We have put together a [remote learning website](#) to compile information about technology, remote learning, and connecting with HTA. I encourage you to go there anytime you are looking for information. One particularly helpful section is tips for parents. It highlights the following suggestions:

- **Identify a dedicated study space for your child.**
- **Set expectations and establish daily routines.**
- **Have daily check-ins with your child at the beginning and end of each day.**
- **Oversee communications from your child's teachers.**
- **Help your child process and take ownership of learning.**
- **Set aside time each day for quiet reflection.**
- **Ensure that your child engages in some kind of exercise or physical activity.**
- **Monitor the amount of time your child is spending online.**
- **Encourage healthy social interactions while also creating social media boundaries.**
- **Be aware of and attempt to mitigate any signs of stress or worry your child may exhibit.**

The combination of a global pandemic (with all its surrounding news and conversation) and the challenges associated with asking students and their siblings to learn at home while parents are simultaneously trying to work remotely is one mess of a social experiment. Add to that complexity the very real possibility that members of the family or close friends may become sick, and it is clear this will be an extraordinarily stressful end of the school year. With all of that in mind, I want to share with you an important decision we have made to help reduce this stress for HTA students, their parents, and their teachers.

Given the unprecedented challenge of the coronavirus crisis, we have had to revise, rethink, and train for remote schooling. Regardless of whether or not we restart in-person school before the end of the year, the administrative team and faculty agree that it will be difficult to use assessments and grading in this new reality. So, I am writing to let you know that for all HTA students **school work for the remainder of this academic year will be assessed based on a pass/not pass system.**

HTA is not alone in making this shift; some international schools are also moving to pass/not pass grading for the remainder of the school year. As a school we have always questioned the value of

grades and assessment at HTA is mainly criteria and rubric based. In this particular situation, we feel this important adjustment will lower pressure on both students and teachers as we all face the many obstacles resulting from this pandemic.

Next week, after we have lived our new distance learning reality for a few days together, we will be sending out parent and student surveys to get a sense of what is working, what is not working, and what suggestions you might offer so we can make adjustments as we go forward. Look for that survey to arrive on April 15th.

Finally, I wanted to share the email below that I sent to the faculty and staff earlier this week. It will give you a sense of what I think is fair to expect of them and what goals I think they should have for their students. I hope you will take a moment to read it.

Sincerely,

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[www.hta.kz](http://www.hta.kz)

## Principal's Letter to HTA Staff

Dear colleagues,

As we are all working hard on the distance learning program and set up for Q4, I would like to share a few thoughts on the process.

The next 2 months will represent roughly **2-3%** of our students' school education and I think it's important that we focus on **caring for them as individuals and help them find community in this moment**. Any reading, writing, and arithmetic that is also gained is a bonus, not a necessity. **HTA as a community for these students will likely be more important, in the long run, than HTA as a school**. I am counting on you to do the best you can with the forced distance learning delivery to care, connect, and support our students.

In addition to the pressures of being a child and a student quite a few of our students are worried about the news, worried about sick relatives (or will be), and worried about their parents being worried. The human brain does not learn particularly well when anxious or under stress. We do have, and will have, a large number of our students in (and out) of this condition. Your job is to structure the experiences you can for them while keeping this foremost in your mind. Using your knowledge in language, chemistry, math, the arts, etc. to frame this caring work is your task. The only outcome we need to measure is: **Did they get through this OK, and did you do the best you could to help?**

To assist all of us in this effort, I wanted to let you know that we will be announcing to parents and students that **we are going to move to a pass/not pass system for Q4**. Many international schools are doing this or planning to do so. Given HTA's general position on the issue of grades, I think this should not be a problem for us. I am working on a letter for parents and students and will share it with you tomorrow.

Transition to distance learning is complicated. Some people have jobs that will require a good deal more from them as we switch to distant learning; some people have less to do without students in our building. Some of our teachers have agreed to step in to help the english, russian language and math departments. If you feel that your duties are lighter without the kids around, perhaps you can use your skills to help in another area. Please reach out to Reese, Aliya Aknazarova or myself to discuss what work you might be able to do from home. Conversely, some of you may think at first that you can manage your workload online only to find it to be overwhelming when trying to balance home life as well. If you find yourself in this situation, please reach out to me and ask for help; we will be trying to align people who may have some extra bandwidth with people who need support. This will not be a perfect process, but if we all give what we can and ask for help when we must, then I believe we will get through this with a stronger culture and deeper sense of collegiality. That is my hope and expectation.

Lastly, thank you all very much for your hard work and dedication.

Good luck!

Tatiana