



## **Rochambeau Elementary School Distance Learning FAQ**

Dear Parents,

Thank you all for providing feedback on our distance learning program and thank you to our parents' delegates for being such diligent messengers. Based on the questions we have received over the past few weeks about our distance learning program, we have compiled this frequently asked questions (FAQ) document. Our teachers and staff have your children's best interests and continued success at heart, and have been working tirelessly to reinvent their teaching practices. Like you, many of our teachers also face other daily challenges and all of us want the best for each student and we are here to support and guide them through these uncharted waters.

In this challenging time, families' needs are as diverse as our community is. Some families have asked us for less work for the children, some for more. Some asked for less screen time, some for more Meet time. Some asked for an open schedule, some for a very rigid one. Some families need more French, some more English. We are trying to take everyone in consideration, in the same way that we are taking every child's needs in consideration in the classroom.. We hope that this FAQ will give you more clarity about why we have made the choices we have. Thank you for your help and support.

### **How did you develop your Distance Learning Protocol?**

First, we did our research and wanted to take advantage of our internal resources (gathered teachers for regular meetings, developed a harmonized protocol, considered how to be consistent in our communications, etc.) and external resource opportunities (AEFE worldwide schools, AEFE resources specific for North America, AIMS, French Ministry of Education, etc.). What we learned after talking with several AEFE schools who had started Distance Learning programs one month earlier than our school and after having weekly meetings with the French Inspector and her team is that we needed to build very solid foundations which would help prepare us for both short term success and longer-term



sustainability (if necessary). Some specific key points of the advice we received and consensus our team reached:

- Prioritize simplicity (number of tools, activities to be done by the students, etc.)
- Be patient: This will be new and unique for everyone, and there will be some trial and error before finding the right rhythm for our school.
- Acknowledge differences: If you walk down the hallway on campus, you would find that our teachers each have unique in-class teaching styles. We should therefore expect the same approach to unique online teaching styles. Differences don't need to be eliminated; everyone brings different kinds of strengths.
- Don't overdo it: Many schools have seen students fall behind and families give up quickly because of the workload or schedule that is too busy. (In the US, the National Board of teachers recommends a reduced workload as compared with traditional in-class lessons.)
- A phased approach: Focus the first few weeks on solving technical issues that will enable students and families to have a stronger foundation, better overall routine, and greater understanding of the tools we use when the pace of work gets faster.

**Can we have a weekly plan, sent to us in advance, in order for us to organize our family schedule and work plan?**

Yes, it is possible and should happen systematically. Nevertheless, that doesn't mean that every activity can be sent to you in advance. Daily work is to be posted on a daily basis based on the materials covered that day in class. With that in mind, you may still organize your child's workload to fit within your family's schedule (e.g. sending part of the Tuesday's work on Wednesday) but it is preferable to stick with the schedule given, to allow students to have meaningful interactions about the work during class meets.

**Is it possible to maintain a consistent class meeting schedule?**

Yes, that was our goal from the beginning; it just took us some time. There will be some adjustments finalized in the coming days (duration of classes, number of class sessions, etc.) so that after the Spring Break the schedule should remain pretty regular. Teachers will try to avoid changes, but whenever changes are necessary to inform you as soon as possible and offer to reschedule. We will also do our best to send the Meets links/nicknames/invitations to both parents in the household.



### **Why are the Meets limited to 15 to 20 minutes for some classes?**

First, there is a significant difference between the abilities of 1st graders and 5th graders in their focus, attention and autonomy. At the beginning of our Distance Learning program, the class meeting time might have appeared too short for your child including the time needed to get acquainted with Meet and some procedures (e.g. muting one's mic). Now that technical problems are mostly solved (see below), the time is able to be used more effectively. In 1st and 2nd grades, 20 minutes is considered a maximum of focused online time in a small setting with a great deal of interaction. Additionally, if we are to be guided by our in-person classroom instructional methods, a 45-minute lesson would typically include some combination of teacher instruction, group activities and individual work. Therefore, a 45-minute lesson to be done online where the teacher is primarily at the "front" of the class to lead a lesson in a one-directional way would be out of sync with our teaching methodologies, especially for younger grades.

### **Why are meetings conducted in small groups instead of with the whole class?**

This decision is mostly driven by the age of the students; some classes of older students might be able to have whole class meetings that last longer. In our case, we have chosen to offer more frequent shorter meetings in an effort to provide more quality time for interactions, especially orally. One of the main aspects of teaching children is the social-emotional relationship. It is easier to express yourself in a small group than it is in a big one. If there are 5 students in a 20-minute meeting, and longer for older students, it brings more numerous opportunities for students to interact, speak and engage orally. Of course the amount of listening would be greater in a longer session but the speaking elements considerably less; we determined that spoken interactions would be most important to the students and have therefore favored shorter, smaller group meetings. We are providing to you some resources for additional listening opportunities at home, either created by us, e.g. small video vignettes, or that are made available to us and that we have curated.

### **How have you determined the number of Meets per week?**

What we are striving for is a balance between the group meets and the open sessions for specific help. We have not chosen a one-size-fits-all approach. A good balance may be: 3 group meets and 2 open sessions in French (on top of which you would add English language instruction, special learning support, FLE, and Spanish for the students who also have those subjects), but each teacher knows her/his students, her/his class and what may or may not work best. Some classes may meet a little more or a little less than others. The number of Meets per week has been fluid so far and the routine has evolved a lot. In these



early weeks some teachers have tried new organizations for timing and duration until they find what works best for their specific class(es). Teachers have also been providing more and more video lessons (vignettes, clips)

**If my child has specific areas of difficulty, how can she/he be helped?**

Of course we are here to support every student! Some teachers offer special smaller groups for some students, host open support sessions that students can attend, or they spend some extra time with some students at the end of a group meet. The learning specialist has also started making appointments with students who were receiving special support before our move to Distance Learning and the FLSsco (French as a second language teacher) has started support services as well. The librarian will add her support. We are also exploring some additional digital resources and that might help students with dyslexia or similar learning needs.

**How do you plan and balance the workload? What if my child has too much or not enough work?**

After spending 7 months of our school year together in a traditional classroom setting, the teachers know their students well and they have tried to provide a workload that they expect will be manageable for everyone. Teachers also don't see the work to be done at home in the same way they would see traditional classroom work. There are adjustments to be made (and some already made) and your feedback is essential. The teachers may not be able to accommodate every request, but certainly can explore alternatives (e.g. extra work or making some items optional). We want and need the students to keep their motivation going and do activities that are feasible and offer some measure of challenge without undermining their motivation. It is easier to do this inside a traditional classroom. Please reach out to your child's specific teacher should you have any concerns about the workload for your child.

**We are not a French speaking family. Should I be worried about the level of my child's interactions in French? Can the school do something to help me?**

We understand your concerns. The teachers have been careful with grouping for instance. We provided to families quite a trove of resources that the children can use independently to have more exposure to French (podcasts, books, magazine, videos...). These will not fully replace the classroom interactions, but they do expose the children to a culturally different (i.e. less academic) daily vocabulary. The FLSco team has also started to work with groups of students to give an extra boost when possible. Additionally, we are also trying to improve our communication in the assigned student work: making sure that it is bilingual, that you



have access to the directives clearly and that a maximum of activities that require it have an audio version (e.g. dictée). The teachers are also asking for a lot of audio/video returns from the students.

**How would we know how our children are doing? Will there be evaluations and grades?  
Is my child going to be able to go to the next grade level next year?**

One of the first pieces of feedback you can rely on is the work that your child is giving back to the teacher and that is graded/annotated, in Seesaw or Classroom. The work and progress for every student will be evaluated. We are thinking of the best way to do so in a way that is fair, caring and reflective of progress as well as effort. One of the advantages of the French system is the organization of pedagogical cycles, where students really have three full years to validate your competencies of skill and knowledge. A big part of a teacher's job every school year is to welcome the students where they are. They assess and they adjust. More than ever they will do that at the beginning of the next school year. If promotion to the next grade level is in any doubt, teachers will discuss that with parents directly.

**Is there a possibility for our children to write more and type less?**

For many activities, there should be an option for you to either print the material or take a picture of the paper used. For some activities though, it might complicate the back-and-forth feedback (e.g. a long writing assignment) to do so. We advise you to check with your teacher about what is most suitable for your child's assignments.

**My child misses the social aspect of school. Is there anything I can do?**

This is one area where we think that the small groups we are using for instruction also offer advantages to facilitate socialization and sharing better than whole class lectures/lessons. Still, we recognize this may not be quite enough for all children. We recommend families explore resources to help organize virtual playgrounds or playdates, like <https://www.chicagoparent.com/play/indoor-fun/virtual-playdates/>

**More generally, what is the school doing for the wellbeing, the social-emotional aspect of my child's development?**

We know that it is a tough period. The school wants to be safe, caring and open, more than ever. We have created a Wellness Team, composed of the School Counselor, the Nurse, the PE teachers, the music teacher, the librarian and one assistant. They have started Wellness Wednesdays, with physical, socio-emotional and artistic activities. The small



groups provide a better and deeper check-in from the teachers. The Open Support Sessions also allow students to ask questions. Alexis and Florent, our School Counselors, are sending weekly newsletters with resources to help students and families.

### **Technology has its challenges for our family. What can the school do to help?**

We don't want progress for any students impeded by technology. The school's IT department is available for any kind of issues you might have with hardware (e.g. iPads, chargers, etc.) or access/connection (e.g. lost password lost): [stechsupport@rochambeau.org](mailto:stechsupport@rochambeau.org) . If you have an issue with the use of a specific app, like Seesaw, your contact is Mr. Leroux: [leroux@rochambeau.org](mailto:leroux@rochambeau.org) . Both of these contacts respond to requests for support very quickly and can set up virtual meetings with you when needed to resolve your concerns. You can also find help here:

#### **Seesaw Families : Basics**

<https://help.seesaw.me/hc/en-us/categories/115000881123-Families>

#### **Can families complete activities?**

<https://help.seesaw.me/hc/en-us/articles/360040479311-Can-families-complete-activities->

#### **How do students respond to an activity?**

<https://help.seesaw.me/hc/en-us/articles/115005113426-How-do-I-use-Activities->

#### **How to Respond to Activities in Seesaw 2**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8Zjtckyeu8>

#### **How do students add posts to Seesaw?**

<https://help.seesaw.me/hc/en-us/articles/115001096743-How-do-students-add-posts-to-Seesaw>

### **I sometimes find that Seesaw doesn't seem intuitive to me to use and at times not the ideal tool. What can be done?**

Our choice to use Seesaw as part of our Distance Learning program was largely one of efficiency and practicality. The school already had an account established, it was widely used by many classes, and we didn't need a great deal of extra training to get things started. Mr. Leroux, beyond being available for your tech support needs, has created different test accounts (teachers, parents, students) to test every problem that has been brought to our attention thus far and he has curated a number of short tutorials to help you navigate the product. He has even contacted Seesaw and they have made some changes to our account. For our part, we will do our best to stay harmonized in the way various classes make use of the tool. We do note that a different platform, called Pronote, is used in our secondary school because that tool is better suited for the grading and assignments of secondary school classes.