

# *In the name of God*

Sunday August 9th, 2020

*The Second Webinar on Managing and Reopening Schools Amid Covid -19 :*

## **Safety and Wellbeing of Students and Staff**

*With panelists representing schools from Europe, Asia & Pacific, and the Americas.*



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**Sunday August 9th:**

- 6:00 am Los Angeles
- 9:00 am Toronto
- 2:00 pm London
- 5:30 pm Mashhad
- 8:00 pm Jakarta
- 11:00 pm Sydney



# **The Second Webinar on Managing and Reopening Schools Amid COVID-19: Safety & well-being of students and staff**

Webinar held on August 9, 2020

اعوذ بالله من الشيطان رجيم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

On behalf of the Secretariat of WISE, I would like to welcome you to our Second Webinar on Managing & Reopening Schools. My name is Nooh Kasraie. I would be the facilitator today. It is an honor to be with school administrators from Shia'a Islamic Schools from around the World today. Thank you for joining us today. For those of us who are joining for the first time, the mission of WISE is to provide a platform for the periodical and systematic meeting for Islamic Schools, such as what is happening today. We had a Pre-Summit last year in Istanbul with some schools attending. We were planning to have our first summit this year in Mashhad but unfortunately, because of the Covid-19 situation it was postponed. In the meantime we are having series of Webinars and this is the second one that we are having in the past couple of months. The main objectives of WISE are sharing ideas and experiences, addressing challenges & issues, sharing resources, having professional workshops & programs and developing joint projects and activities inshallah.



**Managing and Reopening Schools  
Amid COVID-19 Webinar Speaker**

Dr. Nooh Kasraie  
Head of School  
RISE Academy, RISE Online and RISE Education System - USA

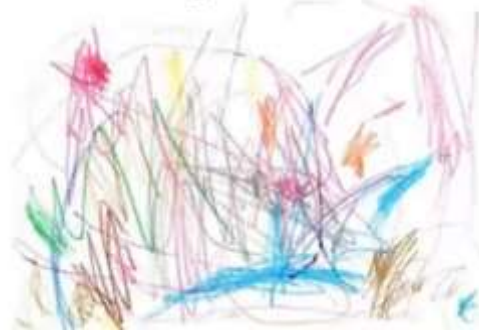
Today we are blessed to have four speakers with us;

- Our first speaker is Dr. Leila Ayyub Mouhanna from Al-Zahra College in Sydney-Australia
- Our second speaker is Sister Azra Naqvi from Hadi Scool of Excellence from Chicago- The USA
- Our third speaker is Dr. Ali Lanzl from Avicenna School from Vienna- Austria
- And our last speaker is Sister Doha Kourani from Imam Sadr Foundation in Lebanon

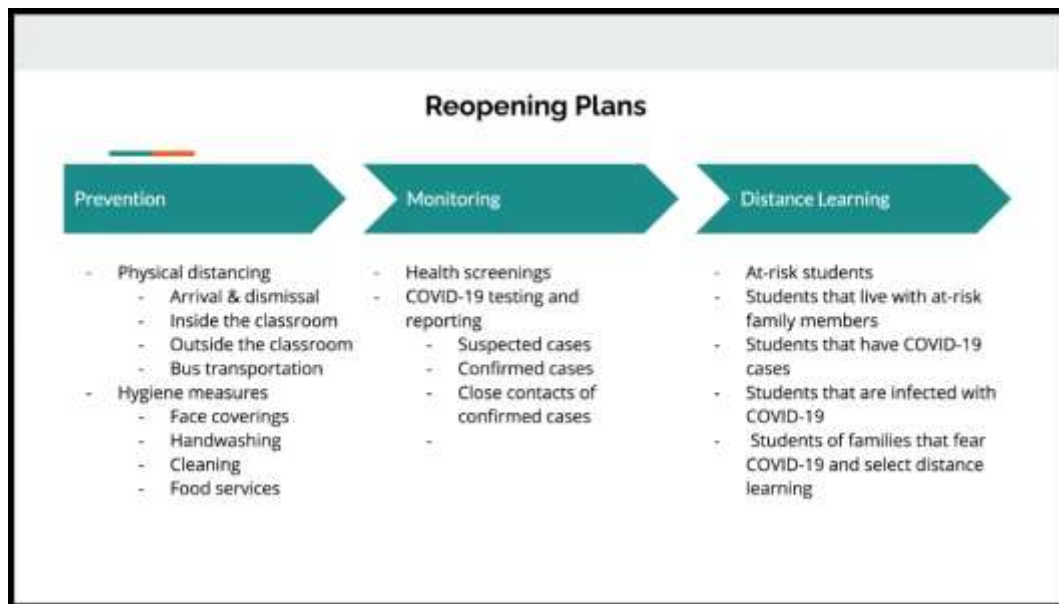
Since we mention Lebanon, I would like to pause for a second and ask everyone to remember those who lost their lives in the tragic incident that took place in Beirut this week and recite a fatiha for the marhoumin of this incident.

Now, when we are talking about reopening schools, your planning looks like something which is on the board;

### Current plans for reopening school next year:



The reason for that is because plans keep changing. Sometimes the governments keep changing their plans. So, you plan for Hybrid or face-to-face and then the government tells you no and that it has to be online only. And when you plan for online, then they tell you there is a way and that teaching can be in person.



If you want to look at the plans that schools are putting together, in general you can see there are some trends that deal with prevention, such as physical distancing or hygiene measures; should we wear masks or should we not wear masks?, what does the government recommend us to do, how often should we wash our hands?, how often should we clean? And is there a difference between cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting?, which one should we do?

The other part of plans deals with monitoring. How do you monitor or screen for Covid-19? What do you do if you have suspected cases or confirmed ones? What do you do if you are in close proximity with confirmed case? Do you shut down the entire school? How does that work?

In addition to that even if you are going in person, what about the students who are at risk. What do you do with those who live with families that are at risk? What if a student has Covid-19 symptoms cause they can't come to school for a while. Is there going to be a plan for them? What about their families that don't just feel fine about sending their child back to school? So, you see you need to have distance learning plans even if you want to have school in person.

Inshallah our presenters are going to talk about this today.

Speaking of distance learning, it is something like what you see in the picture below;



However, Islamic Schools have been shining during the pandemic with the quality of the online teaching they have provided and many of them are planning to be online for a while or start the school online.

But at the end of the day, we are doing all the planning sometimes we forget the most important element that is the students.



We are talking about students who have to wear a mask in class. How does that work? What if they take off their mask?

Some schools have already reopened so they can share their ideas and experiences with us to see how are things working.

**Nooh Kasraie;**

With that introduction, I would like to welcome Dr. Leila Ayyub. She is the head of primary at Al-Zahra College in Sydney- Australia.



**Dr. Leila Ayyub Mouhanna:**

Firstly I would like to thank the organizers of WISE. You have successfully developed an international network for Islamic Schools and Islamic School Educators. We now have a platform in which we could share experiences and resources. So, thank you for making this happen.

I am speaking today on behalf of Al-Zahra College in Sydney- Australia. My name is Leila Ayub Mouhanna and I am currently head of the primary in College.

I will begin my presentation first by giving you a brief introduction to Al-Zahra College. Following this I will address the theme of the webinar series that is I will talk about how we manage the process of reopening amid Covid-19. Specifically I will talk about how we are managing the safety and well-being of our students and staff during this challenging phase.

Let me first start with a collage that one of our teachers made of our kindergarten students. The message of the collage epitomizes the monumental nature of Covid-19 and of 2020 for all of us, especially for our young learners. Specifically it represents the effects it has had on our learners and our staff.



On one hand it represents the isolation and the disruptions to our lives, to routines, our normality and to learning. On the other hand the happy faces of our young learners remind us that they are hopeful, patient and resilient and that this difficult phase will inshallah pass.



Al Zahra College was established in 1998 to provide an alternative education option for the growing Muslim Community in Sydney- Australia. The College had a very modest beginning. The operation began from two modest houses adjacent to and leased from Al Zahra Mosque. From this humble beginning, Al Zahra College has continued to grow steadily. From 1999 to 2000, the school saw a steady growth in student population. By 2000 the school had been growing to reach a stream of classes from kindergarten to year 6. Serving this on, in 2007 the college established its pre-school and by 2010 the school growth necessitated the introduction of the second primary stream. Alhamdolelah the college opened a secondary school in 2012. This was three years before its planned opening date.

**Al Zahra College: 2020**

AZC is an authorized continuum International Baccalaureate school, offering the PYP (Primary Years Programme), MYP (Middle Years Programme) and DP (Diploma Programme).

Through the Islamic faith, which is foundational to the College, our students are nurtured to develop high moral values and ethics.

A total of 468 students: with 283 students in the Primary and 185 students in the Secondary

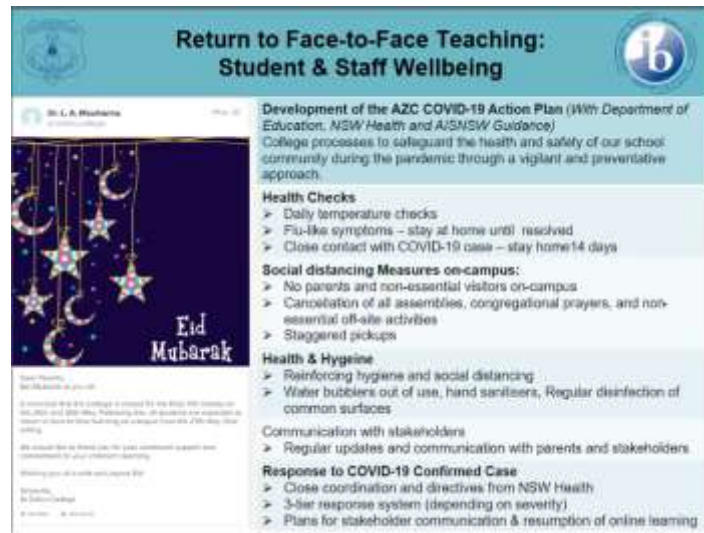
Today Al Zahra College continues to grow. We currently have just under 500 students. We are an authorized continuum International Baccalaureate World School. An IB Continuum school means that we offer Primary Years Program (PYP), the Middle Years Program (MYP) and the Diploma Program (DP). We are actually one of the few schools providing the three programs.

At the college Islam is the foundation of what we do and who we are. We nurture the Islamic identity of our students through an Islamic learning environment and through an Islamic curriculum. Our goal is to instill high moral values and ethics in our students. Our college mission statement reflects our Islamic identity. It also reflects the IB mission statement. Our aim for our students is to develop faithful, knowledgeable, and wise young people who take the responsibility to create a better and more peaceful world. Our students are encouraged to become active learners & critical thinkers. We aim to promote intercultural understanding and respect. We aim to develop international minded learners who embody profile of IB.

Now I would like to turn my focus on Covid-19 and how we have managed our students to stay safe since we have reopened.

First I would give you a brief timeline of our off-campus learning and reopening. Note that our academic calendar in Australia begins late January. So, we have had our experiences with Covid-19. Disruptions began at the end of our term one of the 2020 academic year. Since then we have reopened. On March 24, the New South Wales government dictated that all schools begin off-campus learning. The schools had to remain open for children of essential workers. But mainly that meant that all of our students remained home and did not attend school. Off-campus learning continued for almost eight weeks. After that the government dictated that all schools begin a phase reopening beginning May 11. This was almost about the third week of term 2 for us.

Our kindergarten students and year 11 & 12 started face-to-face learning two days a week and the remaining students attended school one day a week. Then we returned full-time to face-to-face learning on May 27, which was after Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr. The end of Ramadan was a good time to return to school. Since then we have had an approximately five weeks of face-to-face teaching and a four week mid-year vacation. We had a lot of planning we needed to attend to before our students returned to school. We spend a significant amount of time developing the Covid-19 action plan. We developed this plan based on the guidance from the department of education and New South Wales Health department. Throughout the Covid-19 situation we have closely followed the directions, clearly communicated this to the colleagues to stay calm and especially to the parents.



As part of our plan, we introduced or maintained previous strict tough measures. With these measures we tried to keep our students and staff remain safe. Firstly we do daily temperature checks at the school gate. Secondly we enforced the policy that any staff or student who have any flu- like symptoms must not be at the college. And any staff or students who have come in close contact with Covid-19 patients must not attend school for fourteen days. We have also canceled until further notice any gatherings of large numbers of people. So, we have canceled all our assemblies, congregational prayers, and non-essential off-site or on-site activities that require a large numbers of people. Also our policy is that no parents and non-essential visitors are allowed to enter our school grounds. We have introduced staggered pick-ups in the afternoon to avoid crowds. We also reinforce hygiene and social distancing rules through posters and regular reminders by teachers during the school day. We also regularly clean common services whether it's the door handles, desks and any of those common services that are exposed during the day. We also provide hand sanitizers for all the classrooms and office and our water bubblers are out of use. Throughout this phase we try to maintain regular communication with parents. We have made a policy to update them on any changes in our processes and policies.

We also developed a response plan to aid Covid-19 confirmed cases. This is based on a three T system depending on the severity and the close contact of staff or a student to keep the college community safe.

Alhamdolelah, we have been implementing these strict safety measures for the past five weeks. Our parents have appreciated it and have been really cooperative and supportive. A few days before I give this presentation, I talked to some parents and teachers. The general response to school reopening has been very positive. There is a great sense of relief in parents and staff that children are back to school, they have a sense of routine, and they are getting their education face-to-face. Parents showed a great appreciation for the works of the school and teachers. Teachers said that children were bored at home so they are really happy that they got back to school. During the online teaching many parents declared they were overwhelmed and stressed and when they returned, they were behind social communication and thinking skills. Although they have been taken good care at home, there was still a lot of positivity when they came back.

We had some of our parents who didn't speak English and their first language was Arabic. Their young learners required a lot of support because they didn't have that support from their parents. For those parents we did video conferencing with the students. We also did a lot of booklets. We provided them with further copies of worksheets and booklets that parents could repeat those on a weekly basis when they work with them.



We also had problems with parents who were working full-time and were not available to give support to their children. We really had to be very flexible. That's why when students came back after the online teaching, there was a lot of discrepancy in their progress. Some students had done next to nothing because their parents had work commitment, they had English barrier, and they didn't have the internet access. On the other hand, some students had very supportive parents. So, we had to be very flexible and understanding since students come from very diverse background. We received lots of messages from their parents complaining about the amount of work they had to do. We just asked them to do what they could do and that we told them their wellbeing and their children's wellbeing was much more important to us. So if your life circumstances don't allow you to spend a lot of time with your children, don't worry. Actually our school was not in a complete lockdown. For those who were essential workers we told them to bring back your children to school. We had a few parents who took that offer. This way we could ease their concerns and stress because their wellbeing was more important to us.

Alhamdulillah we didn't have any challenges about the wellbeing of students when they returned. I will talk about some of the concerns that we encountered so that you could be prepared when you are reopening schools;

- Firstly we found that the students had forgotten the expected behavior and the school rules. So we had to have our students re-acquainted with school rules and routines.
- We had to reassure teachers and parents who were afraid of contacting with Covid-19. We did this well by reinforcing safety measures on the ground. When they see we are serious about safety measures, they felt safe and reassured.
- Teachers and executives had concerns about the lost face-to-face learning time. Although we had a successful online teaching using a good online platform and the teachers were prepared enough for online teaching, it never replaces face-to-face teaching. When we came back we realized we had to work hard about the pace and sequence in our learning program, documents and approaches to learning skills.
- We had to be flexible about our teachers and give them support, collaborate on teaching and learning process.
- We also found that the dynamics of interactions by online learning had faded. Many shy or introvert students are in their shells. It was a shame seeing these students going back into their shells when we resumed face-to-face learning. It made us think a lot about how we could get them back to become more active in interaction with others.

Finally, we have been addressing students' wellbeing by giving them a platform to talk about the world and what's been happening in the year 2020. Our teachers are encouraged to debrief students and to implement incidental learning. For example, this year one of our teachers wrote a book about Covid-19, that we encouraged our primary school teachers to read to our students. In Australia, 2020 has been a tough year; we have had the Australian bushfires, the floods and Covid-19, also the black lives matter movement, and the most recent one the bombing in Lebanon. The majority of our students come from Lebanese back ground. Some of them had grown there. So I think we were very much impacted by what happened in Lebanon. We would like to give our students the chance to talk and learn about what's happening in the world. I think giving them an avenue to address the world issues is good for their wellbeing.

These have been our experiences. I hope that I have given you some beautiful ideas and wish all of you all the best in the coming weeks as you reopen inshallah. Thank you very much for your time.

Before transition to our next presenter, I would like to show you a video especially for those of us who were not in our first webinar, just a summary of our first webinar.

**Nooh Kasraie;**

Our next speaker is Sister Azra Naqvi. She is a founding member and the co-principal of Hadi School of Excellence in the USA. She has been educated for many years and she is completing her doctorate in educational leadership. She is also the board member of many organizations including the council of Islamic schools of North America. We are honored to have her with us today.



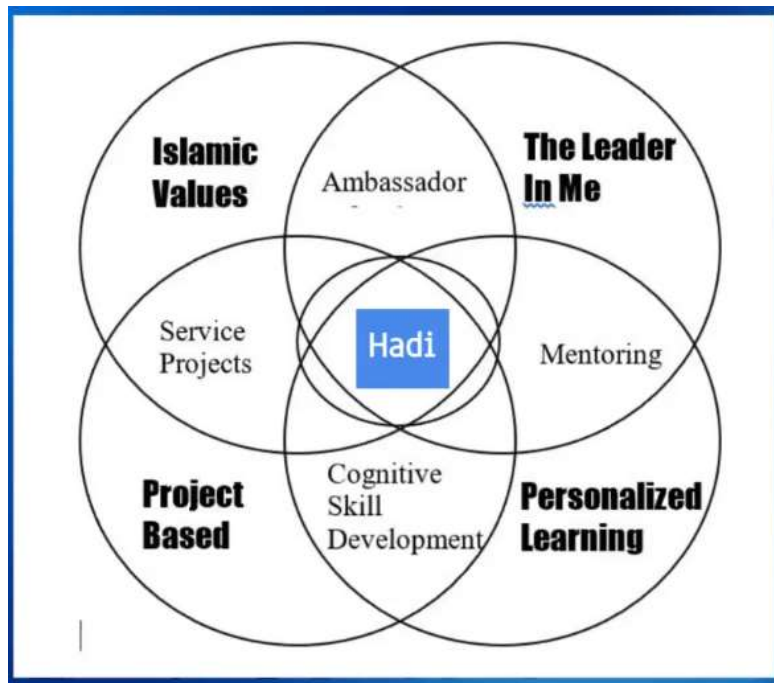
**Azra Naqvi;**

First of all I want to wish you all Eid Ghadir Mubarak. I am more than humbled and honored to be a part of WISE Forum and I am looking forward to helping & learning from other schools that are in the world. I have learned a lot from Sister Ayub from all the ideas and tips she has given to us especially because of the fact that we haven't actually started school yet.

As our brother said I am the principal of Hadi School of Excellence which is pre-school to the eighth grade full-time Islamic school in Chicago. We have been here from 2003.



Our vision is to cultivate the whole child. We want to cultivate the leaders of tomorrow, motivating them to be self-directed learners and by applying the skills, knowledge, and habits to emerge as passionate and well-rounded contributing Muslim members Inshallah.



Just to give you a background of who we are, Islamic Values are the main part of our school day and it is integrated in every subject. We implement the “Leader in Me Program” which is an evidence based school model that really empowers students to learn to do leadership in their life skills when they thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other than that we implement the Project Based Learning Approach, a methodology that students gain knowledge and skills by working or extended period of time on a specific project to investigate the authentic engaging questions on this project. Lastly we promote the Personalized Learning Approach for students, this way they have the ability to move on their own and demonstrate their own mastery and skills on their own pace. We do the student & teacher mentorship program that really helps students to direct their self-pace learning.

Before continuing, I want to talk about these two verses from Qur’an that really help me to go into doing things at certain times. The first is from Sura Blad Ayeh 4;



“God has created the human being in the atmosphere of hardship.” So we were created in struggles and difficulties that we need to embrace and know that this is a test from our God. Then we need to persevere and overcome these challenges. Now more than ever we must show our students the importance of embracing diversities and respecting each other’s differences. This is the biggest challenge that our generation has dealt with. Every generation has dealt with their challenge though, there was the great depression, the world war, Spanish flu, even our Prophet and our Imams. What we do as a response to these challenges and our actions determine our future.

Another Ayeh that really helps me is from Surat Baqara verse 153. “Indeed Allah is with the patient one.” He wants us to be patient. Once we overcome the challenge, we will come up stronger and our children will learn new skills and talents. We need to prepare our students and children for their new age. We all know and understand that education will never be the same again. Children must learn how to communicate, to collaborate online and how to solve problems using technology and how to express their ideas online. Every child must learn digital literacy.

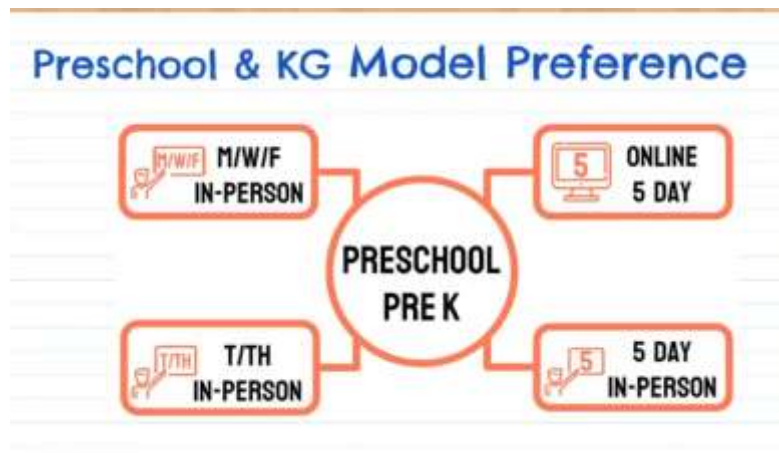
In this time of pandemic, Hadi School created a committee that comprises of different members of the community like parents, teachers, and students to understand and navigate how to proceed at this time. With that we also created the Hadi Phased Opening Plan through which we wanted to give parents an idea where we are standing because it’s a time when parents are unsure about a lot of things. We need to be able to navigate that.

<b>HADI PHASED OPENING PLAN</b>			
<b>Hadi Phase 1</b>	Full online Full online Full online	1st to 8th grade Preschool & Pre K Kindergarten	State Mandated Shutdown for ALL schools and daycare centers.
<b>Hadi Phase 2</b>	Full online In-person/online In-person/online	1st to 8th grade PreSchool and Pre K Kindergarten	<b>*WE ARE STARTING HERE*</b>
<b>Hadi Phase 3</b>	Hybrid Model: 2 days in person 3 days online In-person/online In-person/online	1st to 8th grade PreSchool and Pre K Kindergarten	Intermediary Phase to prepare for a return to in-person learning.
<b>Hadi Phase 4</b>	Hybrid Model: M/T/Th/F - In person W- Online In-person/online In-person/online	1st to 8th grade PreSchool and Pre K Kindergarten	Return to in-person and hybrid model with adherence to State health and safety guidelines.
<b>Hadi Phase 5</b>	In-person In-person In-person	1st to 8th grade PreSchool and Pre Kindergarten	Vaccine is in place! School resumes to Normal

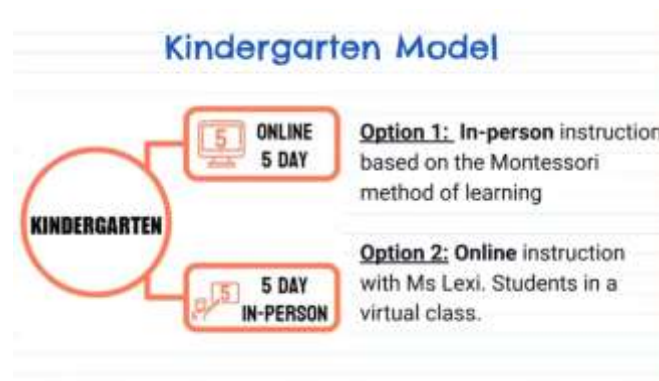
When schools were off completely because of the Covid-19 situation, we were pushed to emergency learning in Phase 1. Hadi School was in the stronger position to pull the students forward with the already implemented technology.

Right now we will be starting what we call it Phase 2 which is blended between full and online.

The safety and health of our students and staff is the top priority for Hadi School. During our virtual meetings with parents we presented our reopening plans to them, giving them the options of in person or virtual learning. However due to the number of Covid-19 cases, right the day after we communicated with parents, this district switched to online only platform. Therefore we changed our plan to be in line with the district that we reside in. at this time, the earliest we feel we would be going back to school is October 19. We continue to evaluate the situation based on the state and district guidelines and inform parents if there are any changes.



So basically all first to eighth grades would be online. However, since we are not mandated to online our elementary or early childhood education, we are happy to find ourselves in the happy position to provide cares to pre-school and Pre-kindergarten kids for those who need it both online and in person learning.



Our kindergarten is also in the same position. Since we have Montessori program, we allow level one of Montessori for 3 to 5-year- old children.

In the beginning our school provided the option to offer both in person and online learning service. We provided the parents with the Chrome book, the computer device, so that they would be able to use our program in order for them to proceed the learning. We tried to ensure them that the plans for both the in person and online version are in sync. So even if we go from in person to online or vice versa, the transition is smoother. Therefore we need to take that into consideration when we plan our mass schedule.

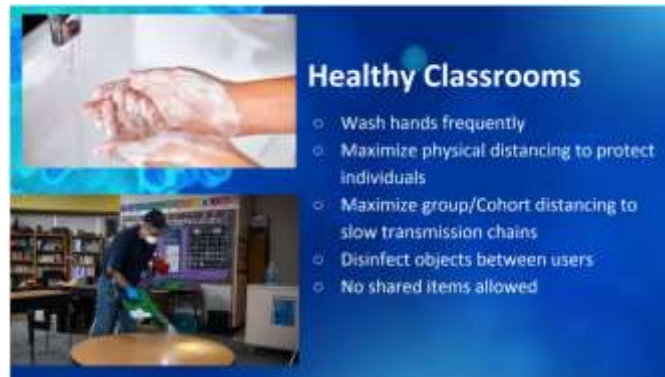


In terms of in person learning we have implemented several safety protocols. We look at the guidelines from the Certified Disease Control (CDC) in the national level, ISBE in the state level, as well as the Department of Children and Family (DCFS) which is the early childhood education

requirements, and finally the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to make sure that we are covering the basis to make sure the safety of our children.



In order to make sure about the safety of our classrooms, the number one safety measure that was being implemented is wearing masks for both staff and students. We pointed out to the parents that based on research the likelihood of transmission of the disease is drastically reduced to almost to zero when all parties wear a mask and maintain safety distance. So both the school and parents are required and responsible to educate our students about the importance of wearing a mask and feel comfortable wearing it. This is important to be practiced before they come to school.



### Healthy Classrooms

Hadi School has taken many additional health protocols to make sure that the classrooms are healthy, for example frequent hand washing during different times of use, we make sure of the cleanness of the materials very frequently being used like the key boards, the light, the flush and etc. our school has also been divided into three different cohorts. It means the pre-school and Pre-kindergarten is one cohort, Kindergarten to second grade is another cohort, and third grade to eighth grade is the final cohort. These three cohorts along with the teachers will not interact at all with each other so as to slow the transmission chain if God forbidden, there is a chance of a person who tested positive. So at that time, only the cohort will be in quarantine instead of the entire school being closed down. Besides, the cleaning crew will be using a special disinfected materials and daily cleaning.



## Healthy Buildings

Hadi School has worked diligently to ensure that we have a healthy building for our students and staff. The above list reflects some of the measures. We have increased ventilation, implementing special filters for indoor air. We will also supplement several proper portable air purifiers for our classrooms. We also want to use plexiglass where there is a barrier between the teacher and student to slow down any transmissions. And finally focus on the cleanness of the bathrooms.



## Healthy Policy

As mentioned earlier, our school policy reflects the recommendations of Bureau of Health Officials and Organizations. So parents are required to sign the Parent Consent form in the beginning of the school year to indicate they are aware of the risk they are taking despite the abundant safety protocols Hadi School is taking. Parents are required to do pre-screening daily. Before they even come, we want them to be screened and answer specific questions if they had been in contact with any other people, or if they had fever last night, have they been taking any medicine to reduce any fever. We do all these things to make sure temperature control is there.



## Healthy Schedule

The elementary students are normally the ones who move from class to class where the teachers are really in the classroom and the students are more around. However, because of this pandemic we really re-shaped the schedules where we have the students in the classroom and teachers are the ones who are going to be moving around. It is what we call the master school nightmare but it is something we need to do to avoid people in the common areas and hall ways and breaking the social distancing. Also the students who normally eat in the cafeteria would have to eat lunch in their classroom. We avoid any assembly or the congregation. We want parents know that even though we are not going to have an assembly together, we will be having the assembly in the classroom and we will make sure that our values maintain.



## Health Activity

Our committee recommended several games that can be played during the recess. Our physical education will rely on the endurance training and games that do not require touching. Our after-school club also had to be redefined to make sure that there are both in person and online after-school clubs. Recess will no longer be combined that we used to do with cohorts. Instead teachers will restructure activities and not leave students by themselves but have them do some activities and still maintain social distancing.

These are the things we are doing to reopen our school. We are confident since we had online learning in spring, our teachers are very accustomed to it and have had enough time to develop the skills to provide students with engaging lessons online. Regarding the assessment, since the state said it was not required, we decided to have the assessment for our eighth grade. With several apps and technology programs in place, we could successfully conduct the assessment online.



## Nooh Kasraie;

Our next presenter is Dr. Ali Lanzl who is the administrator and teacher of Islamic studies at Avicenna Private School in Austria. He is a very humble brother but he has a double PhD. He has Hawse studies. So, sometimes we call him Dr. Ali, Brother Ali or Sheykh Ali. If you ever want to hear zekr mosibat or Moloudi in German, Dr. Ali Lanzl is the person to go.



## Ali Lanzl;

Salamon Alaykom, dear brothers and sisters. I am very glad to be here. Thank you for organizing this really good webinar. Thanks to the previous speakers. You talked about almost everything, so my job is much easier because most of the points are similar concerning our school.

First of all I want to say that the symbol of our school is a tree because of the famous German poet, Goethe. He said that education is the most important thing which people need to be literate. It makes our roots and wings.

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	Islamic Unity Challenge	
	Corona Measures	

First I will give you a short presentation of Avicenna School. Then I will share with you the challenge we have in our school due to the special characteristics of our school which I call it the Islamic Unity Challenge. And finally I will elaborate some Corona Measures we take at our school.

## PROCESS OF FOUNDATION




- ❑ The School was established as an elementary school in 2003 with 10 pupils
- ❑ In 2013, the school building was moved from district 15 to district 21 in Vienna
- ❑ In 2015, the high school and kindergarten were established

Avicenna was established as an elementary school in Vienna 2003 with 10 pupils. Thank God, we moved to a new building in District 21 in 2013. Later in 2015, we could establish the kindergarten and high school levels.

The kindergarten is for kids from 0 up to the age of 6. Currently there are fourteen kindergarten students at the school. The elementary school is for children from 6 up to the age of 10. There are about 100 students at this level. The high school is for students from 11 to 18.


We normally have congregational prayers for Zohr & Asr. There are extracurricular trips like hiking, skiing and trips to make the students familiar with the Austrian traditions and culture.

The students at the school come from families who were immigrants to Austria from Turkish, Arab, Bosnian, Iranian, Afghan, Pakistani, Austrian and mixed nationalities so they have different cultures and there are ethnic diversities. They also come from different denominations of Islam, 60% Sunni & 40% Shia. As a result we face an issue at school which we call it “Islamic Unity Challenge”. However, thank God, the school has a good position in both Sunni & Shia Communities. At the same time we feel some tensions in this regards because some of our Sunni brothers are threatened being in a school with Shia management and Shia background. Similarly, some Shia families are threatened by the Majority of Sunni students at school. The big question is how to deal with unity and if it is possible to find a religious ground for this topic. This can be a challenge between pragmatic & religious approach. Pragmatic approach is not enough to find the answer so we need to reply on religious approach.



### ISLAMIC UNITY, WHY?

#### PRAGMATIC VS RELIGIOUS APPROACH



❖ وَأَضْمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَكُمُ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمْ فَيَسَّرَ لَكُمُ الدُّعَاءَ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا مُرِيدًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

*All of you united had fast to the rope of God, and recall how He favored you when your hostility to each other had torn you apart. He united your hearts in one faith and through His Grace you became brothers. You were on the verge of falling headlong into the abyss of fire, but God saved you. This is how God explains to you His revelations so that you may have the right guidance.*

❖ إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ ﴿١٤٢﴾

*People, you are one nation and I am your Lord. Worship Me!*

❖ لَسَا الْيَتِيمُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَتْلَحُوا بِرَبِّ الْعَزِيمِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَرْحَمُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

*Believers are each other's brothers. Restore peace among your brothers. Have fear of God so that perhaps you will receive mercy.*

There are numerous verses of Quran which deal with the topic of unity. So we focus on the unity when face with each and every differences in the denominations of Islam.

- "NORMAL BEGINNING OF SCHOOLS ON 7<sup>th</sup> of September
- All Measures are prescribed by the government

## CORONA MEASURES

Finally, we come to the measures we take at school at the time of pandemic. Our school opens on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Currently it seems that we will start school normally like before which means we no longer have to have the Hybrid system or the online teaching which were at place last term during a two-month lockdown.

Maintaining social distancing is difficult since in some classes we have up to thirty students. Besides we have space limitations.

### Main Measures:

1. Social distancing
2. Masks ?
3. Common Covid 19 Tests of Students
4. Appropriate & Local Measures in case of Infections of Students or Staff – Corona traffic light - Avoidance of school closure
5. Reduction of duration of quarantine from 14 to 10 days for students and staff.
6. Digital Learning Platform: Microsoft Teams
7. 8 Point-Plan for digital learning - Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)  
<https://www.virtuelle-ph.at/dlm/>

As a whole all measures are prescribed by the government and can't make independent decisions or take any independent measures. We hope for a normal start but at the same time there are possibilities for some measures to be taken into account. The most important measures to be implemented are keeping social distancing. Last term it was not necessary to wear a mask but probably this is not the case in the upcoming term. The government plans to test students for Covid-19 by random in each class. If the result is negative it shows the class is not infected but if they spot a positive case, then they will test all the class individually.

The aim of our government is to take appropriate and local measures in case the students or staff are infected. The aim is to avoid school closure. Because the disadvantage many students experienced during the lockdown and the so-called digital learning program were severe.

The government also speaks about the reduction of quarantine from 14 days to 10 days for the students and staff because they say according to some studies in the field, 10 days is enough.

During the lockdown period our digital platform was Microsoft Team and we were quite satisfied with it.

The Austrian Ministry of Education developed the Eight- Point Plan for digital learning. It has been presented recently. They also introduced the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) which will open from the next day. I don't know if all people around the world can have access to it or not. The aim is to train and prepare teachers to use distance learning apps for any eventual unpredicted lockdown again. I quoted the website to refer to in case you are interested in knowing more about it.

## Nooh Kasraie;

The concept of Unity proposed by Dr. Lanzl was an important one especially at the time of this pandemic. It is important for all schools to be united, to collaborate and communicate and to be on the same page regardless of being Sunni or Shia.

Now I would like to introduce our next speaker who is joining us from Lebanon and from a very prestigious foundation named after Imam Musa Sadr. Sister Doha Kourani is the Deputy Headmaster at Rihab Zahraa School in Lebanon.



## Doha Kourani;

As Brother Nooh said, I am presenting on behalf of Rihab Zahraa School which is a part of Imam Sadr Foundation and is located in South Lebanon.

Imam Musa Sadr who was the founder and reference of the foundation had a philosophy which is based on two approaches:

- 1) To allow everyone to determine their everyday needs
- 2) To empower them to meet these needs themselves.

When we say needs, in fact we are talking about daily life needs, including education of course.



In 1963, Imam Musa Sadr launched the nucleus of woman empowerment by establishing “Beit El-Fatat” in Tyr in south Lebanon. Then he drew this assignment to his sister, Sayeda Rabab Sadr, who is now the chairperson of Imam Sadr Association. The empowerment program focused on

dress making, embroidery & handcrafts, First Aid training and homemaking. These programs and projects have now expanded to a better advanced force.

In 1981, Rihab Zahraa Elementary School and Rihab Zahraa orphanage were launched to reach out all orphans and vulnerable girls at that time.

From 2019 till present the school has extended to have three main departments; kindergarten, elementary and middle school and in the near future we are going to launch the secondary or the high school, and most importantly the Learning Support Department, which mainly works to educate and integrate those students with special needs & learning difficulties in their regular classes and to provide them with support and therapies they need to be able to communicate and integrate with the society and the school.

Talking about school reopening plan in 2021 or the coming school year, unfortunately the Ministry of Education in Lebanon has not issued the school reopening protocols yet. I guess many of you have heard about the crazy circumstances that we are going through in Lebanon and this of course results in many delays in the protocols that have to be issued by the government especially the ones concerning schools. However, at Rihab Zahraa School we have set a preliminary plan accordingly with the key actions issued by the UNICEF & World Health Organization (WHO) with the supervision and collaboration with the Health Department at Imam Sadr Foundation.

### **General Safety Actions:**

- We asked students and staff with symptoms not to come to school. And when they decide to come back, they have to get the consent from the school doctor to confirm they can come back to the daily activities at school.
- We enforce regular hand washing and daily disinfection of all school surfaces.
- We enforce wearing masks and face shields in all school premises for students, staff, teachers, and even our visitors.
- We provide water and sanitation wherever needed.
- We follow environmental cleaning and decontamination. This covers a training program for the school janitor and cleaning helpers at the school.
- We promote social distancing and limit all large groups of people coming together.

### **Operational Safety of the School:**

- We are working regularly on updating school emergency and contingency plans.
- We are preparing and maintaining hand washing stations with soap and water wherever needed.
- We are in the process of placing alcohol-based hand rub or hand sanitizers in each classroom, at entrances and exits. (it is worth mentioning that schools have not reopened yet and the government has not announced the date schools are going to reopen, therefore we are implementing all these proceedings to be ready as much as possible.)
- We are making sure that ventilation is provided in each classroom and office.
- Concerning social distancing, we have considered to implement several points;
  - a. Staggering the beginning and the end of the school day in addition to lunch time, snack time and etc.
  - b. Canceling assemblies, sport games and events that create crowded conditions
  - c. Creating space for children's desks inside classrooms so that they are apart for at least one meter. This means that depending on the area of classrooms, there has to be 10 to 15 students mainly as a maximum number.

In addition to all the operational plans that went on earlier, there is a very important plan we are working on now and hope to continue in the future which concerns **staff & teachers, students and families.**

We work as a community in Imam Sadr Foundation and not just as a school working on only education. We try to reach out all the community members we could serve.

- With **staff and teachers,** we already started workshops on prevention and awareness. We organized mental health wellbeing sessions to help them overcome all Covid-19 psychological and emotional impacts. Besides we organized motivational and stress management workshops to encounter post-lockdown effects. Our country is currently under partial lockdown so such programs are very essential for the team.
- With **students** who are mostly orphaned and vulnerable, psychological, occupational and speech therapies are already embedded in Rihab Zahra School programs. These consultations and therapies were in place even during the total lockdown. Students are also receiving intensive therapeutic services in forms of tele-therapy & in- campus sessions when possible. We also believe that a continuous communication & interaction with students is very important because it can make them feel secure and stable among all the severe and tough circumstances they are going through especially due to the fact that they come from very tough and severe background. We also work on educative and awareness online sessions. We try to provide our students with some quality time activities especially because they have to remain at home for a long time. We aim to give them some tips to enjoy their time as well as to have fun. We also work hard to make sure about the health profile of our students holistically so we provide holistic health follow-up which means that we try to provide our students any medications they need, especially during this stage, for chronic disease and also we provide doctor visits, medical surgeries, and etc.
- The third approach is the **parental and family support.** We have to complete the correlation among Teachers & staff, students and parents. As a result we provide awareness & prevention sessions for our parents. We also provide in-kind assistance to vulnerable families as well as mental wellbeing programs. We believe family empowerment is also very important so we try to provide vocational and training programs, such as agricultural guidance, sewing, food catering and etc., for these families to get self-sufficiency and independency.

In addition to all the above, we are trying to **implement Targeted Health Education,** which means we try to;

- Integrate disease prevention & control in daily activities and lessons.
- Ensure that this content is age, gender and disability responsive.
- Build activities into existing subjects.

**Nooh Kasraie;**

May Allah bless all of you and your families. We keep all of you, our brothers and sisters, in our prayers. We know that all of us are being tested in many different ways. We ask Allah to protect you and your communities, all.