

Uncategorized

# How the German school in Manila makes schooling in the “new normal” work



17 March, 2021

No Comments

👁 218



Less than 24 hours after the Philippine government ordered schools to close on the evening of March 9, 2020, online schooling at the German European School Manila (GESM) was up and ready. The transition, which one might reasonably think any school would lose at least a week's worth of classes to, took away from GESM a grand total of *one day*.

If that wasn't a display of the oft-noted German efficiency, then we don't know what is.

But while the speed of its transition is impressive as it is, how GESM continued to thrive in the new normal might be more worthy of note. The results speak for themselves: The most recent international assessments of its English-based offerings (IB Diploma Programme and the International General Certificate for Secondary Education or IGCSE) netted a passing rate of 95% – an impressive 12 points above the global average. Its Primary Years Programme's exemplary handling of online classes has been cited in a worldwide conference of educators by the International Baccalaureate Organization itself. Not to mention that not one of its students ever failed the German school-leaving exams (Schulabschlussprüfungen) for 15 years in a row now.

Here, we try to break down what the German school did and are doing differently, the ways it adapts and what could be learned from its example.

## 1. Allowing for the worst

Quite simply, the key to the lightning-fast transition was anticipating it beforehand. Ever since word reached GESM that a physical closure of all schools is possible, its staffers were on the drawing boards, coming up with solutions to a situation they did not know would materialize. A virtual platform was selected and set-up. Key staff members who would orient and instruct the rest of the faculty on the online transition were identified. So when the government announcement came in March, the school only had to push a button, metaphorically speaking.



## Related Stories



EXO leader Suho discharged from military service

🕒 15 February, 2022



BuJo 101: 7 tips to help you get started on bullet journaling

🕒 31 December, 2021



OnlyFans to ban sexually explicit content starting in October

🕒 20 August, 2021



SEVENTEEN is “Ready to Love” in their 8th mini album

🕒 21 June, 2021



Sullivan King drops dynamic new single ‘Loud’ featuring Jason Aalon of Fever 333

🕒 25 May, 2021

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

SIGN ME UP

By providing an email address, I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.

## Popping on POP!



'Thanks for your kind words': GigaChad finally responds to the memes

🕒 1 Year Ago



Epic action blasts off in new trailer of “xXx: Return of Xander Cage”



A GESM teacher conducts online class on March 11, 2020. On the evening of March 9, the Philippine government ordered the physical closure of all schools across the capital.



Review: Queen Latifah starrer 'End Of The Road' really lives up to its title

🕒 4 Days Ago



Brendan Fraser is proof of how Hollywood treats victims of abuse

🕒 1 Year Ago



15 Filipino pet names to call your bebe luv this Valentine's Day

🕒 7 Months Ago

## 2. *Going the extra mile*

Contrary to what one might expect, GESM sends out equipment, books and other items to its students every week *at no extra cost*. The delivery is done door-to-door and would include supplies for arts and crafts, scientific experiments, cooking ingredients, etc. This service has also gone beyond the usual school materials. At the height of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in Manila, the German school's staff went out of its way to purchase and deliver phone chargers, left-handed scissors, printer cartridges, buy medicine and even do grocery for teachers, students and their parents who were either stranded at home or left without any way to obtain what they needed during the lockdown.



GESM staffers work overtime to prepare books and materials for delivery to students on March 16, 2020

And how long did it take GESM to start delivering after the closure? Two days.

## 3. *Riding the trend*

New cultural phenomena emerged from the communal experience of being quarantined at home. Students and their parents are not immune to these trends, of course – a fact that educators of GESM recognized well. As the hashtag *#quarantinebaking* trended on social media, teachers pounced on the opportunity to ride on the fad. Primary classes began integrating baking and cooking in their math lessons to learn about ratios, fractions, and capacity measurements. Even GESM's preschoolers had a class where they made noodles at home while learning about the letter "N".



A GESM student shows off his homemade cookies baked during his Math class

The rise of the so-called "quarantine garden" was another such phenomenon. Partnering with the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry, the German school acquired packs of vegetable seeds for its students, sent to their homes and used for lessons in science, the environment, and economics.

#### **4. Using circumstances to your advantages**

Instead of bemoaning the current situation, the German school tried to see the opportunities presented by the new normal. This is perhaps most evident when GESM mounted its day-long University Fair last November, when the school cobbled together 26 of the most notable higher education institutions around the world and attracted around 400 students, teachers, and parents to register. The attendance figures and program offering were a huge leap from the last such event. The organizational expenses were negligible; there was great flexibility for the attendees; the feedback from speakers and viewers were better facilitated – all because it was done 100% online. Taking advantage of a world locked to the screen, GESM was able to go international and extend its reach far and beyond what would have been considered possible for the same event last year. The same experience was true for the school's parent-teacher evenings, engagement to which increased dramatically since adapting a virtual format.



GESM's Volker Ross and Santanu Bhowmik (first and second from left) with school staffers and the student moderators of the University Fair in the background.

#### **5. Consulting and adjusting accordingly**

Despite having the momentum going forward, one must be able to stop, assess its progress and conduct checks to its performance. In GESM's case, this is done by several surveys and regular consultations with the students' parents (via an institutionalized Parents Advisory Council). Several adjustments to the schedule and workload of the students had already been implemented as a result of this policy, and small tweaks and improvements here and there are still being made along the way. True to its policy of preparedness and adaptability, the school most recently conducted a short research on online fatigue, with the aim of arming itself with the information to counter and prevent it.

#### **6. Giving back when you can**

In December 2020, to end a year full of changes and uncertainties especially for the underprivileged, the GESM community held "A Series of Fortunate Christmas Events", a string of online affairs that raised close to PHP130,000 for several charitable causes. The whole school mobilized to organize virtual concerts, raffle draws and other shows to raise the amount. The endeavor not only taught the students how to work together to mount events, but also imparted to them the value of giving back to the community. As a UNESCO school, GESM strives to develop pupils into socially engaged citizens of the world.



GESM Head of School Christoph-Boris Frank (front row, 3rd from right), Parañaque 1st District Rep. Eric Olivarez (front row, 1st from right) and other GESM staff members pose for a photo with the beneficiaries of the school's Christmas donation drive.

### 7. Planning for all scenarios

While the whole country anxiously awaits the government's reopening of schools, the German school has already acquired and tested equipment for a blended-learning set-up, where classes could be conducted to students who are physically present in the classroom and to those who are tuning in from home simultaneously. The idea is to allow for home-based pupils to be able to see, hear and interact with any other pupil in class, physically present or otherwise. All the while, they are also able to follow what's being discussed by the teacher via video or by receiving the feed from the classroom smart board.



A GESM student attends online class from her home in the province in this photo dated March 11, 2020.

This gives GESM the capability to offer live classes virtually and in the classroom *at the same time*. While a good number of parents probably look forward to the reopening of schools, there might be some who are not comfortable with the idea of physically sending their children back. Should schools be allowed to hold face-to-face classes anytime soon, GESM resolves to keep the option of remote learning open for parents who are of the latter opinion. In any case, it has made itself available and a good option for both.

GESM maintains a good relationship with the Department of Education and the local government of Parañaque owed in large part to its social projects and adherence to safety protocols. Recently, the school has been granted exception by authorities to hold examinations with students on campus. From there, it's not such a far cry to think it would be among those schools in Manila where face-to-face classes would resume first.

### **Conclusion**

When the Philippine government ordered schools to close in March 2020, no one seemed to seriously think it was going to be for the long haul. It's been a year since that fateful announcement and yet the prospect of having pupils return to school physically is as uncertain as it was 12 months ago. How the experience went within that time varied from one school to another, though. And it is clear that not everyone scrambled to create and keep a semblance of schooling alive.

Some, like the German European School Manila, are taking the challenge in stride, clicking their heels as they go.

*For more information about the GESM and its programmes, please email [admission@gesm.org](mailto:admission@gesm.org).*