INTRODUCTION

For over a hundred years, Menlo School has offered students a holistic and rigorous education. We have a wealth of knowledge at our disposal for how to engage students in learning that is innovative, engaging, and personalized.

However, recent global events have shown us that we are increasingly likely to need to stretch our skills in areas that may, at first, feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable. In response to emergencies that yield whole-school, extended closure, it's important that we know how to lean into the challenges of teaching and learning remotely.

We want to acknowledge that Menlo School was not initially designed to be a virtual school, nor are we intending to become one; but, in the face of global conditions that are out of our control, it’s crucial that we be flexible and adaptive so as to avoid disrupting the learning of our students any more than we need to.

This handbook is our sincere initial attempt to provide what clarity and reassurance we can that, together, we are going to continue to serve you and your students well. We hope you take it in the spirit of the intention with which it is offered, which is as a working document that will grow stronger with each iteration. If we lead together with compassion and vulnerability, we will get through this moment and may even emerge with new insight into teaching and learning practices that will yield benefits for years to come.
Though much of teaching and learning online is the same as in the shared physical classroom, here are two key terms that will help you navigate the shift.

**SYNCHRONOUS**

Class interactions occur in real time, at the same time.

Example: students gather in a Google Meet at the same time to engage in a discussion or a teacher-facilitated lesson.

**ASYNCHRONOUS**

There are no live class interactions. Students self-pace through materials (such as assessments, worksheets, and recorded videos) that teachers have uploaded to Haiku in advance.

Teachers are available to support students via static methods (such as discussion boards and email).

Our distance learning plan incorporates a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning and privileges flexibility for small-group, and individual check-ins. This is intentional: in an emergency, we want faculty and students to both know when they are going to see each other and to be able to adapt to whatever demands their health or circumstances require.
KEY TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

In the event of a significant school closure, we’ll be grappling with a fair amount of complexity. That’s why it’s important we streamline the amount and type of technology tools we employ. The list below contains the primary apps we’ll be using for simplicity and continuity.

1. **Haiku**: Teachers will primarily use Haiku as an organized, central hub for all distance learning. Students should therefore get in the habit of checking Haiku daily. Teachers will ask students to upload assignments to the Dropbox section and will share updates via the Announcements function. They will also encourage students to use the Haiku Inbox so as to keep communication in one place, rather than via many frequent emails.

2. **Google Meet**: Teachers will host live class instruction (in small- or whole-group) via this method, which also allows for recorded sessions to be posted after the fact to Haiku. This is already linked to your students’ Menlo email account for easy calendar invites and use.

3. **Google Collaborative Suite**: Including calendar, email, reminders, etc. Students already use these apps, and so should continue to do so. Some teachers may also use functionality from Google Classroom.
Mission

Menlo School’s Mission is to empower students to explore and expand their interests, reach their fullest potential, and develop the skills necessary for success in college, and become ethical, responsible, and engaged members of ever wider communities.

TEACHING & LEARNING REMOTELY

Distance teaching and learning require fundamental changes to how students learn; we will not simply be able to shift all of our day-to-day practices to a virtual environment without adaptation.

This next section of the handbook, therefore, will provide students and their families with suggestions for how they might navigate their studies during a school closure.

We also want to acknowledge that, in such a moment, many of our decisions will be made initially and then may need to be adjusted in order to best serve our community. Our school mission can provide some guidance in this moment by reminding us of our commitment to designing learning experiences that prepare students for a world beyond school—a world of significant ambiguity and complexity, in and of itself. Though not desirable or ideal, our willingness to embrace the challenge of moving our endeavors entirely online is an opportunity for us to model for our students our core values of flexibility, vulnerability, and reflection, which will serve them well as they leave Menlo and make us more adept adult learners ourselves.
HABITS OF SUCCESSFUL ONLINE STUDENTS

In order to thrive in an online learning environment, students must have certain traits and habits. The following are examples of the qualities that successful online students possess.

1—Ability to work independently.

Tips for Staying on Track

• Design a suitable study space that is organized with binders so that materials and coursework are easy to track and accessible. Studying outside the home? Have portable organizers at the ready to bring with you.

• Experiment with systems to help track due dates and learning steps (Google Cal reminders, pen & paper, student planner, etc.)

• Bounce ideas off of other students, your family, your pets, and friends by phone, text, or Google Meet.

All students have to juggle deadlines, but in order to be successful with online learning, students must be able to keep up with all their work in an unfamiliar rhythm. This is absolutely doable, with a few adjustments. Start with a self-awareness check: do you need a friend to help you stay accountable? Or a family member? How often and in what way? Or what helps you get unstuck when you hit a learning block? Consider the resources you already rely on at school and make sure to keep those in place; then add in a few that might help you in this new environment. Your Advocate and family are wonderful supports to help you figure out what those might be as you acclimate.

2—Strong time management skills.

One way to improve at time management is to strengthen your understanding of how long it actually takes to complete a task so that you can set aside enough time to do so. This is especially true for our Upper School students, who will be practicing, with the support of their Advocates, significant asynchronous learning time, especially for AP courses.
3—Knowing when to take breaks.

Students may spend long hours in front of their computer working, so in order to stay refreshed, it’s important for them to take regular breaks away from the screen. Our schedule has been designed to encourage and allow for flexibility, both for teachers and students.

Take time to step away and be physically active so that your brain gets a break; pursue a passion project; read a book for fun; connect with family; make a meal or have a snack. All of these activities are not distractions: they’re crucial to your staying engaged in learning.

4—Willingness to Participate

Everything you already do as a student in class at Menlo is also helpful when learning remotely: asking questions, participating, staying committed to doing your best, staying organized, having a plan for your work, and reaching out for extra help.

Classroom discussions are often where students learn the most. The more online students participate in class, the more they absorb the material and get the most out of the experience. This means being active during online meet-ups, contributing to discussion boards, and for Upper School, collaborating online in smaller groups.

Tips for Staying Connected & Supported

• Engage fully in your Advocacy check-ins. Remember that all the adult supports (mental health, college counseling, Advocate, and trusted teachers) are still available to you and time is set aside in the week for you to reach out to them.

• Phone a friend! Seek peer support.

• Participate fully in synchronous group activities
It's important to note here, also, that students need to remember that being online academically requires “netiquette” that they may not be used to employing in digital spaces that they’re used to being more casual. Emails, discussion areas, blogs, etc. in the context of a course are professional areas, not social areas, and should be regarded as such. Students need to use their best grammar, spelling and writing style. Constructive criticism is key, not bashing individuals for their opinions. Respect for their teachers and, likewise, respect for all students is also key. All regular school rules apply and some thought should be put on how students "show up" when interfacing online. For example, wear what you would wear to school and choose an open, public place for any video conferencing. If a bedroom is the only space available, because multiple students and adults are working remotely in the home, please make sure the bed is not in view, the background is plain, and the door is open when video conferencing. Anything that is done, said, or written online is public and will be heard and seen by your teachers and administrators.
GUIDELINES FOR FAMILIES

Distance Learning incorporates a mix of asynchronous and synchronous learning and offers flexibility for small-group and individual check ins. Asynchronous learning means that students self-pace through materials such as self-assessments, discussion boards, worksheets, and videos that teachers have uploaded to Haiku. Synchronous learning means that class interactions occur in real time, at the same time. Students might gather in a Google Meet with the teacher to engage in a discussion or direct instruction from the teacher. The guidelines provided below are intended to help parents think about what they can do to help their children navigate a distance learning environment.

We encourage parents to:

1—Help establish routines.

Teachers will post assignments in the Upper School and topics in the Middle School on Haiku so that students can plan their week. Their plans should include time for work, time for collaboration, brain and body breaks and time away from the computer. Ask them to show you their weekly plan for how they’ll manage their time and assignments.

2—Define the physical space for your child’s study.

Help your child set up a place to work that is relatively quiet and close to a WiFi connection. Siblings may need to work in different rooms to avoid distraction. Parents may even experiment with noise-cancelling headphones (no music necessary!) to block out distractions. The norm for distance learning is that students should work in common areas, preferably not in a bedroom, particularly during video conferencing. If a bedroom is the only space available, because multiple students and adults are working remotely in the home, please make sure the bed is not in view and the background is plain when video conferencing.

3—Encourage physical activity and/or exercise.

Menlo does not want its students staring at computer screens for 7-8 hours a day. Make sure your children remember to move and exercise. Ask your child when they have scheduled exercise into their day. This is vitally important to their health, wellbeing, and to their learning. Menlo’s Athletics department will recommend activities or exercises for Middle School students in place of PE.
We ask parents to remember that most teachers and students are not experts in distance learning and that it will require some trial-and-error to successfully navigate this new experience. Some students will thrive with distance learning, while others may find it more challenging. We ask that you give teachers some grace and space and be mindful in your communication with us. We thank you in advance for your patience, flexibility and partnership!
In order to support a gradual ramp up to distance learning, the school will begin with **entirely asynchronous teaching until such time as we feel ready to implement synchronous learning.** This will be determined by the Head of School and Division Leads and communicated to parents and families promptly.

**How will my student learn during the asynchronous phase?**

Teachers will post content to Haiku that students can use to self-pace their studies, but will not host live instructional sessions.

**In the Upper School**, we will use our normal block schedule to determine when teachers assign class and homework. For example, if students *would have had* blocks A, B, C, and D, then teachers will assign class and homework for those blocks by no later than the night before. Some teachers may even choose to practice uploading a week of content at a time; they will communicate clearly with students which method they are enacting as we embark on distance learning.

**In the Middle School**, grade level teams will determine developmentally appropriate plans that will differ by grade and be communicated to students via their Advocate.

While we are in this phase, teachers will calibrate carefully with student and Advocate feedback to make sure they are not over- or under-assigning work. Teachers will be encouraged to pare back and to stay within the typical class and homework guidelines, but we expect we’ll need to calibrate as we go as this rhythm will be new to all of us.

**How will my student learn during the synchronous phase?**

Both the Middle and Upper School will enact a “distance learning plan” appropriate to students’ developmental levels. We will continue providing asynchronous learning, but will add in the layer of one synchronous learning block per week and multiple touch points for Advocates, counselors, and teacher office hours as support.

These plans will be provided to families when we are ready to enact the next phase of distance learning and subsequently added to the appendix of this handbook.
Menlo School is heavily indebted to Diana Neebe and Joy Lopez at Sacred Heart Schools, Geoff Ruth at Urban School, and Nueva School for this guide, which has been modified from their own distance learning plans and extensive conversations with them about best practices. Their insights were, in turn, built from consultations with international schools who suddenly had to close for multiple weeks at a time as a result of pandemic (most notably the Taipei American School and the Concordia International School in Shanghai).

As beneficiaries ourselves of others’ generous resources, we are happy to share any resources we develop with colleagues at other schools who may be reading this document. We welcome your insights and resources in return. Please feel free to share this widely and adapt for your needs.

Below are links to a few resources that helped shape our thinking and which you may find useful as well.

- **International School Resources for Virtual School (Google Drive Folder)**
- **Next Vista: Facing an Emergency and Switching to Online Learning**
- **Concordia International School, Shanghai: When Virtual Learning Is Your Only Option (podcast)**
- **George Washington University Tools for Instructional Continuity**
- **15 Strategies for Online Learning (Global Online Academy)**