



2020-21 Legislative International Education Study Group

Estonia’s Approach to Distance Learning, September 2020

Timeline

Schools closed on March 16, and distance learning began immediately. In-person classes resumed on May 15 for selected grade levels and priority groups. In fall 2020, in-person classes resumed with the goal to make the 2020-21 school year [as normal as possible](#), though with social distancing measures in place. If needed, schools will return to hybrid models, and prioritize in-person instruction for grades 1 to 6 and students with special needs.

Guidance provided to schools and teachers:

Schools in Estonia were [responsible](#) for designing their own approaches to distance learning. The Ministry of Education and Research and two government-supported foundations—the [Innovate Foundation](#) and the [Information Technology Foundation for Education](#) (HITSA)—provided recommendations, including a [guide](#) to the decisions schools and teachers would need to make in designing distance learning. Schools were [encouraged](#) to find a “reasonable balance” among types of learning materials, including traditional textbooks and workbooks.

Resources provided to schools, teachers, and families:

[HITSA](#) provides [lists](#) of linked resources for online learning, by purpose. The list of [Tools for Home Education](#) includes: instructional resources (e.g., e-Schoolbag, an online resource library [launched](#) in 2016 that is searchable by subject/topic, grade level/grade span, and resource type); online learning platforms; online assessment tools; videoconferencing tools; apps; and sources of image files, videos, or audio files for use online. There is also a separate list of [Tools for Creating Assessments](#). HITSA provides a [list](#) of recommendations and resources for families, including information on how to contact [parent advice lines](#) operated by Estonia’s nationwide network of Rajaleidja (“Pathfinder”) counseling centers. During school closures, parents could contact an “online learning advisor” via online chat on weekdays for distance learning support. HITSA also provides teacher-recommended [Digital Tools for Distance Learning](#), by subject.

The [Innovate Foundation](#) provides [lists](#) of linked resources by subject and grade span.

[e-Kool](#) (“e-School”)/[Stuudium](#) is an online platform used for functions like recording attendance, communicating with families, posting assignments/materials for students, etc. (i.e., it provides learning management functions, rather than learning content). It was [used](#) daily in 85 percent of schools prior to school closures; use of e-School’s messaging/communication features [increased](#) during distance learning. [Opiq](#), a company providing digital textbooks/workbooks, has made it possible to link student Opiq accounts with e-School/Stuudium so students can access Opiq’s materials.

Impact on Assessments

The basic school graduation exams, which all students take at the end of 9th grade, were canceled in all subjects except Estonian as a second language, which were optional for students needing a certificate certifying their Estonian language level. The exams usually required for graduation from upper secondary school were optional except for students planning to continue their studies in a specialty in which the higher education institutions require the exams. This year, supplementary state exams will be held for those students who were unable to take exams last spring or were unsatisfied with their scores.