A Foreign Country, A Pandemic, And Kids' Education

Every year, hundreds of thousands of families pack their bags and move to a new, foreign country. Some do it for a different way of life, a career, or a myriad of different reasons. Normally, they experience the excitement of a new location, novel foods, and fascinating cultures. Sure, they also experience homesickness, the anxiety of making new friends, and the incredible frustration of having something break and trying to replace it at the local hardware store - where their home language isn't spoken and the broken item looks different than it would back "home." Living abroad comes with some of the highest of highs and the lowest of lows in a normal year.

All of that changed in 2020. Due to the worldwide health shutdown, many of these families that were already in the country have been sent home or threatened with the possibility of leaving. Some foreigners are even threatened just by having license plates from another country. To be frank, 2020 was not kind to humanity at large, but it is proving incredibly difficult for mobile families. Oh, and 2021 isn't starting off so great either!

While I can't determine when you can eat the best döner kebab in Germany (for the record it is at Kalendar found at Gartenstraße 1 72074 Tübingen) without a mask and with all of your friends, I can tell you that educating children doesn't have to be the stressful situation it has turned into this year. While many schools, both local and international, have remained closed and many of them keep moving the goalpost on when they will re-open, one thing continues to be true is that, "These schools weren't fitting the needs of a third culture family anyway."

That raises the next question, "What does a school that supports families look like?" The following are several aspects of schools that are built around the needs of mobile families.

No More School Interruptions During Fly-In, Fly-Out Events

Mobile families are just that, mobile. A school built for these families recognises this and that some of these families are on short-term assignments. Others have a spouse/parent engaged in FIFO (or DIDO standing for drive-in, drive out), but the family has a desire to stay together and ensure their children's education, teachers, and classmate relationships remain intact, regardless of where in the world they find themselves. Choosing a school with a great digital infrastructure is a key component to maintaining these wishes and serving families abroad.

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In Year Movement No Longer Pauses Student Education

One thing we've learned this year is that technology can solve a lot of time and space issues. Classroom education is no different. Why should a return trip to their home country be limited to only non-school months? What if there are situations that require family travel mid-year? Many times, mobile families find themselves returning home to be with a loved one experiencing health issues and an extended stay is required. Education shouldn't, and now needn't, be limited to one building. Families shouldn't have to make the decision to pull their kids out of school or enroll them in a new school for an extended return. A good option for mobile families is a great digital programme with a built-in flexibility. There should be some flexibility to school from another city, region, or even country with little to no adverse complications. From an education perspective, mobility between schools is one of the quickest ways to fall behind. Just because you have to change where you rest your head that night, doesn't mean that the student should fall behind academically.

Travel The Region Without Missing Classroom Instruction

One of the biggest reason's families decide to travel internationally for extended periods of time is to introduce their family to new cultures, experiences, and the history of the country where they land. The problem many face is the parent's work schedule and the students school schedule often don't align for as much travel as the family anticipated. Finding a school that values the hands-on experience of walking to the library of Efés (Ephesus) and following the footsteps of Cleopatra and Mark Antony along Harbour Street should be a top priority. Additionally, students can still access their schoolwork, attend live class sessions, and work through their curriculum from the backseat of a car, train, tuktuk, or even a hotel.

Supplement Your Existing Offering

Perhaps the expatriate family is settled and that a full-time in-person experience, is the best option for them in the country they

are in. Great! The next question is, "Are their kids able to take all of the courses they want in their current schooling option"? If the answer is no, investigate digital options where one-off classes are available. Don't have AP Calculus? No problem. Take that remotely. Want another world language than what is currently offered - take it virtually! Did their child fail a class and they need a way to recover that credit/retake it? How about a student trying to graduate early and they want to work more quickly through a course or two? Digital solutions exist for all of these exact situations.

Digital learning is a developing sector and there are many options springing up as expatriate families start to realise the flexibility that the digital option affords todays mobile family is the way forward. A digital school also solves one of the most pressing problems an expatriate faces when they are offered the perfect role, but in a country that doesn't have the appropriate education for their family. Enrolling in a digital school means that the school can now come to the child rather than the child going to the school and the curriculum can be managed more closely based on the expatriates countries education system and catered to each child's needs.

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Chase Eskelsen began his educational career as an administrator at Texas Virtual Academy. He then worked with a local Texas ISD to launch the Texas Online Preparatory School. He supported the growth efforts of each of the campuses (grades 3-12) and helped create an operational foundation for success before transitioning to the K12 Inc. National Academy Policy and Public Affairs team where he supported online and blended schools nationwide. He completed his tenure with K12 Inc. as the National Director of Board and Partner Relations.

Mr. Eskelsen now leads an education non-profit, Verano Learning Partners. The Verano team has been tasked by their board to launch or partner to develop new and innovative school models. They have opened three new schools, 2 hybrid and one full-time online, during his time with the organisation. Mr. Eskelsen has his Master's in School Administration and wrote his thesis on the topic of Education Policy for Virtual School Programmes.

The Bridge School is a Verano partner school that focuses on providing an accredited, NCAA eligible American educational experience for students K-12 all around the world. To learn more about the school, please visit www.bridgek12.org.

Want more information on finding the right international school for your family? Get our FREE CHECKLIST, "Questions to ask when Choosing an Online School" here: https://bridgek12.org/checklist/.