Chapter Four
Preparing Students and Parents for Online Learning

* Personnel Required for Post-Summer Component
* Post-Summer Online Session Coordinator
* Part-Time Tech Support Staff
* In-Person Orientation
* Preparing K-5 Students for Online Sessions During the Face-to-Face Session
* Online Session Preparation at Home
* Scheduling
* Challenges
Personnel Required for Post-Summer Component

Preparing students and parents for the online session is crucial to ensuring your program’s success. Regardless of students’ or parents’ experiences with technology, clear step-by-step instructions and guidance must be provided. To start the preparation work with the students and their parents, a program must first fill the following two positions:

Post-summer Online Session Coordinator

To ensure effective, clear communication of program expectations to students and their parents, it is essential to designate a person to be the online session coordinator. This person will serve as the point of contact for the program and as a liaison between students, parents, and instructors. The responsibilities of this position are frontloaded and are less rigorous during the instructional period of the course. This person will be busiest during the preparation stage, before the post-summer online session officially starts. Preparation work includes the following steps:

1. Preparing orientation materials, and then coordinating and conducting the orientation sessions for students and parents.

2. Collecting student and instructor schedules and then finalizing online tutoring times for all students.

3. Setting up the master program schedule. The program has to decide the length of the post-summer online session, and then decide on the start and end dates. When setting up the master schedule, the program should check the K-12 school calendar, and avoid scheduling classes during holidays and school breaks. We suggest that programs not schedule classes on weeks with a holiday, to ensure that all students receive an equal number of online sessions.

4. Preparing record keeping sheets, such as student attendance sheets. Click here for a sample student attendance sheet.

5. Helping to troubleshoot when technical issues arise.

After the online session starts, the amount of work required for this position will be greatly reduced. Possible responsibilities include:

1. Responding to inquiry emails from students, parents, and instructors.

2. Monitoring student attendance.

3. Sending out program updates and news.

When the online session reaches its conclusion, the coordinator will collaborate with the program director to conduct program evaluations, and collaborate with the instructors to compile and send out student progress reports. If the program decides to have students complete post-program proficiency assessments, the program coordinator will also help to determine the assessment dates and proctor the assessment session, if needed.

It is recommended that this position be filled with someone who has had previous experience with the face-to-face program. A summer program instructor could be an ideal candidate for this position as that person will have both administrative and instructional experience. The coordinator can work off-site during the post-summer term.

Creation of a program email account is also recommended. The coordinator should use the program email account instead of his/her personal account for all correspondence with the students, parents, and instructors.

Part-time Tech Support Staff

The second position that is essential to a post-summer online program is a tech support staff
Similar to the coordinator position, this person will also perform the majority of his/her work during the preparation stage. Preparation responsibilities include:

1. Assisting the coordinator to put together the orientation materials, and attending the orientation session online. Tech support can explain to students and parents what kind of technical issues they might encounter and how to troubleshoot. Click here to reference the FAQ page compiled by the Hunter Program.

2. Testing the platform with all students and instructors before the online session officially starts.

3. Being available to offer immediate assistance when the online instructors and students try out the platform individually. Instructors should inform tech support of the technical testing time once it is determined.

After the first or second week, students and instructors might still occasionally need tech support so it is important that this person respond to emails in a timely manner.

Once the program coordinator and tech support positions are filled, work can begin to prepare for the orientation sessions for students and parents. Information on how to prepare for the instructors can be found in the next chapter.

In-person Orientation

When: Because the online term follows the face-to-face term, the in-person orientation session should be held during the face-to-face term. If the face-to-face term is 4 weeks long, it is recommended that you hold the in-person orientation during the 2nd or 3rd week, leaving the last week for students to complete technical online testing from their home.

Where: A school computer lab would be ideal. Instructors can assign tutorial tasks for students to complete while using a lab computer, and can show students how to deal with any technical problems.

Attendees: While students in grades 6 -12 should attend the orientation session themselves, parental supervision is necessary when working online with preteens. It is important for parents of students in grades K-5 to attend the orientation session. Programs can also consider having K-5 students attend the orientation with their parent(s) if space allows. The coordinator should send out the orientation date and time as early as possible so parents can plan accordingly. The tech support staff can join virtually if needed.

What: The orientation session should cover the following aspects:

1. Students and parents should understand that the objective of the post-summer online sessions is to sustain or improve student proficiency in the target language.

2. The advantages of online learning include flexibility and greater individualized instruction. Students and parents should be welcome to contribute their thoughts on the advantages of online learning during orientation; this will encourage a positive attitude towards online learning.

3. Provide logistical information such as technical requirements, platform URL, account login information, etc. During the orientation session, the coordinator can ask attendees to complete pre-designed tutorial tasks to ensure that they have acquired the necessary information.

4. Finally, it is crucial to point out that technical problems may occur, especially during the early stages. Encourage students and parents to be patient when issues arise. This is also why helping them to understand the purpose of the
post-summer online session and establishing a positive attitude towards online learning is very important.

Click [here](#) to download a copy of the orientation PPT template.

We have observed that some parents do not check their email regularly. Therefore, it is extremely important to remind parents during the in-person orientation that they must check emails daily because all communications will be delivered via email. It is also important that students and parents respond promptly when asked. Although other methods such as texting or other forms of instant messaging might be easier to use than email, for tracking purposes it is recommended that all parties use email. In addition, communication tends to be more formal via email. Instructors can send emails from their own email account but it is important that they copy the program or program coordinator’s email at all times.

### Preparing K-5 Students for Online Sessions during the Face-To-Face Session

In addition to going over the logistical information with their parents, it is also important to have K-5 students experience a trial online session before the official online program starts. The testing session can be done in small groups, with 3-5 students taking about 10 – 15 minutes per session. Online instructors need to be available to conduct test sessions with students, and a face-to-face instructor needs be on-site to assist students. If there are about 20 students in the program, the testing sessions can be completed in two days, allocating 1 hour per day. The Hunter STARTALK program observed that K-5 students respond positively to online instruction. As we mentioned before, young children have much shorter attention spans, so we recommend 30- to 45-minute online sessions for students in grades 3-5, and 20 to 30 minutes for students in grades K-2.

### Online Session Preparation at Home

After the in-person orientation, tech support should conduct the first synchronous run-through with students and parents at home, to ensure that their computers are correctly configured for the online platform. Audio problems are the most commonly encountered technical issues, so the tech support member needs to make sure that students can hear others well and can also be heard. Tech support can provide time slots for students to sign up for run-through, and the sessions can be done in small groups. Lastly, tech support needs to arrange run-through sessions with the instructors.

A second run-through session should be done between instructors and students to eliminate technical issues. This should take place after scheduling is complete, but before the first official online session.

### Scheduling

Depending on the number of students, and the format of your online classes (small group vs. one-on-one), scheduling can be one of the most challenging tasks. Scheduling for one-on-one sessions usually is easier because only one student and one instructor are involved. Scheduling for small group sessions can be more difficult because students, especially high school students, often have very different and busy schedules. Three to four weeks may be needed to finalize a workable schedule.

The task of scheduling can be divided into three steps, with at least a week allocated for each step. First, collect information on both student and instructor availability ([sample email to high school students](#); [sample email to parents](#); [sample email to instructors](#)). The Program Coordinator should send out the initial email that includes a tentative online session schedule so that students and teachers are informed of the start and end dates as early as possible.
Second, after receiving everyone’s availability, the coordinator should match students and instructors with similar schedules. Keep in mind that some students might not be able to provide their availability until they finalize their regular school and extracurricular schedules. Therefore, it is recommended to start the online session 2-3 weeks after the academic year has begun. To maximize everyone’s schedule, the program can also encourage instructors and students to hold online sessions on the weekends if they cannot find time during weekdays.

Third, after the initial matchings are complete, the program coordinator should send out an introductory email to students and instructors respectively. The instructor should send follow-up emails to their students to confirm session times.

**Challenges**

As opposed to the summer face-to-face session when classes are held every day and for several hours each day, students and teachers will only meet once or twice per week during the post-summer online session. In addition, the post-summer session will be scheduled after students’ regular school schedule, so the amount of time and energy that students will devote towards Chinese learning will likely be limited. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges that a post-summer program will face is rescheduling.

The convenience and flexibility of online classes will also contribute to students’ tendency to reschedule or not show up without prior notification, especially if the online class is one-on-one, and offered for free. Therefore, it is extremely important to have an attendance policy:

**Sample Attendance Policy**

1. Once the class meeting time is determined between the student and teacher, the time should be kept the same throughout the semester.

2. Students can make a set number (2-3 times is reasonable) rescheduling requests per semester. The request must be made 12 hours prior to the scheduled class time. All requests must be emailed to the instructor and copied to the program or the program coordinator’s email. The request should not be made via text message or any other forms of instant messaging.

3. Students will be removed from the program after the third unexcused absence.

Because both students and teachers will have other commitments during the post-summer term, rescheduling should be allowed, but the program needs to decide on a maximum number to avoid inconveniencing the teacher and to ensure that students complete the required instructional hours by the end of the post-summer session. Students and teachers may exchange phone numbers, but the program should discourage communications via phone or text message unless it is absolutely necessary, as it would not be possible for the program to track and review the correspondence if miscommunication occurs between the instructor and student. Asking students and parents to reschedule via email also maintains the formality of the request.

The program can consider issuing a warning email before removing a student from the program due to attendance issues. For instance, if a program decides to allow three unexcused absences, a warning message can be sent after the 2nd unexcused absence. Click here for a sample warning email.

To avoid having students miss sessions, it is also helpful for instructors to send a reminder email to students or parents on the day of the class. Instructors can also encourage students or parents to set up reminders on their calendars. When students are asked to comply with the attendance policy, of course, it is also important to ask the instructors to do the same.
Step 4
Language Proficiency Assessment

Face to Face Learning
Step 1

Online Learning
Step 2

Step 3
Final Presentation

Presentation