

Covid-19 Response and Campaign Update

ORT has made significant adjustments to support its educational network of schools and programs around the world as we all grapple with the unprecedented challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of global school closures in March, ORT rapidly mobilized and launched the Immediate Needs Campaign to ensure our 300,000-plus beneficiaries in Israel, the Former Soviet Union, Latin America, Asia, South Africa and Europe had the resources and support they needed to quickly transition to distance learning.

ORT initially focused on providing our students and teachers with the devices, online platforms and training they would need to move to online learning. As the pandemic continues into its sixth month and the fall filled with uncertainties, we have identified new and shifting needs of our schools and students and are preparing to respond to what the future brings.

Since March ORT has raised \$550,000, of which \$331,000 are eligible to be matched by a challenge grant. Funds have been used to address the needs of students, teachers and schools including:

- Providing 217 computers and tablets to students and teachers in Russia, Ukraine, Milan, Rome, Madrid, Bulgaria, Moldova and Israel prior to schools closing for the academic year or reopening (Israel). All of the needs of our constituents that were identified were addressed including providing internet connectivity.
- Securing IT infrastructure and access to video platforms to enable schools to remain connected with students at home
- Providing financial support for 626 students in Brazil, Milan, Rome and France whose families have been severely impacted by Covid-19, covering tuition fees, canteen and security contributions.
- Ongoing consultation with school leadership to assist in the development and implementation of distance learning plans
- Online professional development and teacher training seminars based on the specific needs of schools, in their local language

ORT also developed additional online global competitions and social activities, and adapted existing programs to continue virtually, to help students keep their skills sharp, learn in creative ways, and fill the void of learning remotely:

- **Online Math Club** – The activities offered by the Online Math Club engaged 54 high school students from nine ORT schools from Ukraine, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The club keeps the

students' skills sharp and helps them learn from home in creative ways. ORT plans to expand the program to include our students in other FSU countries, as well as in Israel, Europe and Latin America.

- **Taub Young Entrepreneurship Program(YEP)** – The format of this annual ORT program, a highlight of the year, was modified due to Covid-19. The 2019-20 program engaged 20 teams, a total of 300 students, and two teams shared first prize for their innovative eco-friendly projects. YEP participants work in small teams to design a product which solves a social problem. Teens from the Scuola Della Comunita Ebraica in Milan devised a crowd-based shipping platform and a team from Colegio Israelita de México ORT (CIM-ORT) in Mexico City created reusable smart gift bags which allow users to track the number of trees they have saved by not using wrapping paper. Students said continuing the YEP remotely provided a welcome break from core subjects and gave them renewed enthusiasm for the competition.
- **STEM Enhancement Program**- The STEM Enhancement Program offered enrichment activities and STEM competitions for students of all ages worldwide. Students competed for prizes by working on offline projects to develop their science and technology skills. Twenty-one submissions from students were received by the ORT Creative Connections Program and the STEM Communication Award Program received 34 submissions. Winners will be announced by the end of summer.
- **Virtual Volunteers Program** - ORT created the Virtual Volunteers Program to allow ORT students to benefit from the breadth and depth of experience of ORT's global supporters. More than 100 volunteers offered to share their experience, expertise and skills. Fifteen volunteers helped 120 students, 20 teachers and 3 ORT Russia staff team members practice conversational English. ORT also offered a three-part zoom mini-series that provided hour-long masterclasses on the skills and competencies to help student get ahead in their future careers. Topics included networking, effective leadership and teamwork, and thriving in professional environments. Approximately 20 students, educators and other professionals attended each session. As a result of the positive impact of the program, ORT plans to reignite the Virtual Volunteers program at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year.

In May, **ORT held a virtual Educators' Forum which brought together more than 60 senior educators from 17 countries**, representing dozens of ORT schools. Educators focused on lessons from the pandemic and the ways education can be reshaped by this experience. The group valued the support of the network and the shared experience with global colleagues.

Looking Ahead

In May and June, the school year ended for all schools in the ORT network and it remains unclear when or if school buildings will reopen in the fall and if so, what classroom learning will look like. We anticipate many schools adapting a hybrid model with virtual and in person lessons. ORT's education team are in touch with schools regularly as new information becomes available so that we can support their needs and assist with program delivery for the fall. ORT will remain nimble so we can be responsive to the changing environments in which our network schools are operating.

If additional need for laptops, tablets, and internet connectivity reemerge, we will address those needs. We are prepared to support schools that reopen for in-person learning by providing funds to keep buildings clean and hygienic, and to facilitate the installation of required partitions and other related equipment. We will also ensure they can purchase any personal protective equipment for students, educators and administrators. Other needs identified by ORT educators and schools for the 2020-21 academic school year include: 1) academic support for high school seniors when they return to school so they are prepared to pass critical exams and graduate and 2) safe transportation to school for students and teachers.

We know for certain that scholarship funds will be needed for the Jewish Day schools in the ORT network that receive tuition fees. Many students' families have been severely affected financially by COVID-19, with parents becoming unemployed and facing a myriad of economic losses. As a result, a large number of families are now unable to meet the cost of ORT school tuition. To ensure that no student misses the opportunity to attend an ORT school due to financial constraints, ORT is raising funds to be used for tuition support in ORT schools in Italy, France, Spain and Brazil.

Conclusion

In Jewish communities over the last 140 years, ORT has operated in the most difficult circumstances, providing education, training and community support to vulnerable Jewish communities. From Pogrom-infested Russia in the 1880s to the Warsaw Ghetto in the 1940s to the former Soviet states in the post-perestroika 1990s, ORT has provided educational and vocational training programs to ensure people have the transferrable skills needed to gain employment and survive during times of crisis.

Our mission, to provide the underserved among us with the skills and means to succeed, remains strong. ORT has the fortitude – built on our experience, expertise and global support – to bridge the education gap and provide underserved communities with transformative opportunities to build a better future, even in turbulent times. Just as ORT did not walk away from previous threats to the Jewish people, we will not abandon our responsibilities to students, their families, our teachers and the entire ORT family facing this pandemic together.