Graf-Zeppelin High School: Successful learning in the digital classroom

Teachers and students from Friedrichshafen overcome challenges from the coronavirus crisis with Avaya Spaces. The majority of German schools were unprepared when the coronavirus pandemic arrived. It’s no wonder, as in 2019 Germany was still trailing the pack when it came to the Europe-wide e-learning ranking. The Graf-Zeppelin High School has shown that there is another way. The Friedrichshafen-based school introduced the collaboration solution Avaya Spaces to the network within a few days of the nationwide lockdown, switched teaching to a virtual classroom quickly, and thus set up optimal conditions for successful knowledge transfer in the digital space.

For days rumors had been spreading and on March 13, 2020 it was finally confirmed: due to the coronavirus pandemic all schools were to be closed throughout Germany. The Friedrichshafen-based Graf-Zeppelin High School (GZG) also sent almost 800 students and 80 teachers home. However, this was not a matter of holidays. Because, according to political stipulations, the educational mandate should, despite the coronavirus lockdown, continue as planned.

But that was easier said than done. Digital learning opportunities were only rudimentarily available at the GZG, as in many other German schools. But, while many others were initially paralyzed by the coronavirus crisis, GZG management quickly went into overdrive:
"We met the day after receiving the information about the school closures and discussed how to proceed", remembered Silke Baer, member of the school management team.

It quickly became clear that without digital tools high-quality distance learning would hardly be possible. But, inadequately secured applications also offer possibilities for data protection violations. Because, in contrast to the regular lessons, anonymous participants can enter unnoticed into the virtual classroom, interfere with the lessons, or tap into and misuse sensitive information such as personal data.

"Open video chat offers such as Zoom did not come into consideration for us," explains Fabian Feiri who takes care of IT-assisted lessons in the GZG management team. A secure system that could be obtained via a German or European computer center was sought. "This ensures that the cloud software complies with the demanding requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation", explains Feiri. An important aspect for schools, especially as special data protection rules apply to minors.

Open up digital worlds for learning in an uncomplicated manner

When comparing various products, Avaya Spaces stood out for the school. The cloud solution works in an encrypted manner at all times when transferring and filing data as well as video conferences, and also meets the requirements of safety and data protection set by the school. Furthermore, in addition to telephone and video conferences for several hundred participants, the platform offers many additional tools for virtual communication and collaboration. Students and teachers benefit from chat functions as well as the ability to share content and documents online. "Avaya already convinced us after the first test run, also from a

At a glance

• Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Graf-Zeppelin High School was faced with the challenge to establish online educational opportunities for around 800 students as quickly as possible.

• Due to data protection and safety, video chat offers that are freely accessible were out of the question for school management. A closed solution was required.

• With Avaya Spaces, the high school has implemented a further digital platform in record time with which the students and teachers can maintain straightforward contact.
cost perspective", says the IT manager of the high school. Because Avaya enabled educational institutions and non-profit organizations a fast and uncomplicated entry into the digital world during the first phase of the coronavirus crisis with an attractive freemium offer. As a result, the high school was able to connect its new communication and collaboration solution to the network in record time. “Everything ran like clockwork”, states Fabian Feiri. Only the setting up of the mail addresses for the around 800 students took a little time. “Nevertheless, it was worth it”, he says. Thanks to the internal school email addresses, the IT manager can reliably keep an eye on all users and can ensure that no uninvited guests sneak into the digital classes. In addition, the GZG remains “Master of the Data”. “This way we make sure that sensitive information does not get into the wrong hands”, explains Feiri.

The solution was on the network within a few days

The first video conferences already took place at the GZG four days after the announcement of the nationwide school closures. The management team first tested the solution in a small group, then initial groups of students were invited to the virtual classroom. By the end of the Easter holidays, “Spaces” was set up for all 33 classes and courses of the school, which signaled the start of the digital lessons. The students thus were able to personally see their classmates and teachers four to five times per week before the re-opening of the schools.

“Even though the video lessons are voluntary around 95 percent of the students now participate”, says Silke Baer. The acceptance of the solution is also increasing among the college. The positive response is not surprising to Baer: “Students enjoy learning in virtual class groups and teachers have a better overview of learning achievements and issues via video conference.” Senior students meet in virtual space in small groups to study for their graduation exams, older students coach younger ones, teachers of various subjects can share lesson plans and content easily and in real-time. A special highlight is the virtual sports lesson: “The first time 65 pupils and even a few parents participated”, says Fabian Feiri.

Enter the new normality with Avaya Spaces

But even after resumption of the traditional classroom, Avaya Spaces offers the GZG great benefits: “For example, colleagues from the risk group can participate in school conferences in this way without fear of infection”, says Silke Baer. “They remain safe from a health-perspective, but at the same time remain informed of important developments and information.” In addition, the digital learning offer can also reliably help in compliance with the specified distancing rules in school operations. Currently, at the GZG 60 percent of the schooling takes place in a virtual space and this will probably not change in the near future. Experts assume that the virus will continue to control everyday school life for many months. “Thanks to Avaya Spaces, we can offer more normality during the crisis”, Fabian Feiri.
“Students enjoy learning in virtual class groups, teachers have a better overview of learning achievements and issues via video conference.”

—Silke Baer, School Management Team, Graf-Zeppelin High School, Friedrichshafen.

Solutions

- Avaya Spaces

"Avaya Spaces convinced us after the first test run already—also from a cost perspective."

Fabian Feiri, School management team, Graf-Zeppelin High School, Friedrichshafen

About the Graf-Zeppelin High School

Under the motto "Creating the Future Together", the Friedrichshafen based Graf-Zeppelin High School guides around 800 students towards graduation. In addition to a broad spectrum of languages, natural and social sciences, as well as musical subjects, the general education high school is characterized as a "Partner School for Sports", due mainly to its sports focus. The six-member school management team and the around 80 teachers support students with a sophisticated teaching concept and numerous offers that go far beyond the classical understanding of school. Further information is available at www.gzg-fn.de.

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