

COVID-19 Response for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Yunnan Province, China

October 5, 2020

Overview

In this note you will learn about:

- Challenges faced by young children in Yunnan province, China during kindergarten closures due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and during their transition back to school
- Examples of support provided to children, parents, and teachers
- Policies and procedures put in place in Yunnan Province, China to guide kindergarten closures and re-openings
- Evidence that children and their families who received support during school closures had better development outcomes

Introduction

School closures due to COVID-19 pandemic have left over a billion students out of school globally. Governments are pursuing a variety of approaches to mitigate school closures.

Yunnan is one of the least-developed provinces in China and typifies the challenges facing China's early childhood education (ECE) sector both before and during the crisis. Over the past decade, Yunnan has made great progress in improving access to ECE, with gross enrollment rate increasing from 37 percent in 2010 to 84 percent in 2019.¹ Despite this impressive progress in ECE access, there are still constraints in education service delivery, resulting from the lack of professionally trained ECE teachers, the lack of systematic quality assurance, and poor support for vulnerable students, especially in rural areas.

Before the pandemic, children from rural and poorer counties and households were already lagging behind in terms of child development outcome and could be further affected by the extended school closures without proper support. According to the 2018 survey conducted in Yunnan by China Institute for Educational Finance Research (CIEFR), which assessed children's development outcomes using the Chinese Early Human Capability Index (CeHCI), children from rural areas were already lagging behind their

¹ The People's Daily. 2018. "Yunnansheng Zhuoli Buqi Nongcun Xueqian Jiaoyu Duanban (Yunnan Province strives improve its preschool education in the rural areas)". September 30, 2020. Available online in Chinese:

<http://yn.people.com.cn/GB/n2/2018/0308/c378439-31321044.html>

Yunnan Department of Education. 2020. "Yunnansheng 2019/2020 Xuenianchu Quansheng Jiaoyu Shiye Fazhan Tongji Gongbao. (Statistical bulletin of education development in Yunnan Province for the 2019 / 2020 academic year)". September 30, 2020. Available online in Chinese:

<http://jyt.yn.gov.cn/web/ac1f1eb64e6d4e36999869a47598935d/9d03708b61fc4b6b982355b4e1d8b8fd.html>

urban peers in the overall development index by 0.34 standard deviations (SD).² There were also large disparities in child development outcome between counties: children from Wuhuaqu District, the most well-developed county of the 12-county sample scored 0.70 SD higher in the overall development index compared to children from Qiaojia County, the least developed county in the data sample.

In Yunnan Province, caregivers, especially those from less developed counties, lack proper child-rearing skills: in one study 72 percent of the sampled households from poor counties in Yunnan Province never played with their children.³ As children stay at home for an extended amount of time during the pandemic, the challenges associated with the lack of quality interaction with children are exacerbated.

The COVID-19 outbreak coincided with winter school recess in China and caused a delay in school reopening for the Spring 2020 semester, where the original opening date was around mid-February. When Yunnan's ECD services officially reopened on May 28, Yunnan's 1.4 million children enrolled in the ECD system had stayed at home for three months. During this period, the local government and kindergartens took various measures to support ECE within emergency responses. This briefing note documents lessons from the frontline pre-school personnel and contributes to the global repository of knowledge on coping strategies during the public health crisis, such as support mechanisms during pre-school closures and plan for reopening.

Support Mechanisms During Kindergarten Closures

As part of China's decentralized system in ECD delivery, Yunnan adhered to the general epidemic prevention and control guidelines and 'Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning initiative' at the national level while it adopted creative approaches ensuring teachers, parents, and children received pertinent support during the closure of ECD services.

Policy on Epidemic Control and Undisrupted Learning

National epidemic prevention and control guidelines. The national Ministry of Education (MOE) issued a series of guidance documents on controlling and preventing COVID-19 across the education sector.⁴ The guidance for kindergarten includes the basic knowledge of the disease, public health protocols, responsibilities of related personnel, and management of kindergarten facilities. It suggests that service providers develop the preventive mechanisms, train all staff, conduct real-time monitoring and disinfection, and secure the prevention materials.

Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning Initiative. During the school closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the national government launched the Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning Initiative to promote teaching and learning at home for children, although the government specifically prohibited

² 37,902 children and their caregivers from 367 kindergartens across 12 counties in Yunnan participated in the 2018 survey.

³ Liang, Xiaoyan; Yinan Zhang, and Yu Fu. 2013. *China - Early Child Development Project : Early Childhood Education in Yunnan : Challenges and Opportunities (English, Chinese)*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

⁴ Ministry of Education. 2020. "MOE Issues COVID-19 Control and Prevention Guidance for Schools." March 16, 2020. http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202003/t20200316_431834.html.

direct teacher-child online learning sessions for pre-school children as a means of support.⁵ The government provided a series of digital resources to parents and teachers through the National Public Service Platform for Educational Resources (www.eduyun.cn). The online platform has been developing since 2012, and currently has 259 free online ECE courses for parents and teachers. These resources are categorized by children's age (newborn, one to twelve months, one to two years, two to three years, and three to six years) and by domains (daily care, feeding, disease prevention, vaccination, development and learning, and health and safety).

Support private ECE. In April, 2020, MOE issued a policy to encourage local governments to support private kindergartens during the epidemic prevention and control period. Specifically, MOE emphasized that, since the COVID-19 outbreak, some local governments have initiated a series of policy to support the private kindergartens, including direct subsidy, rent reduction, tax reduction, and increasing access to financial services. In response, some local governments issued support mechanisms for the private ECE sector (Beijing, Zhejiang Province, Shanghai, Chongqing, Shaanxi Province, Hebei Province, Xiamen, Hefei, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Wuhan). In Box 1, we provide an example of how Wuhua District in Kunming supported private kindergartens in response to the pandemic.⁶

⁵ In lieu a better understanding of how to effectively engage young children online, it is likely the MOE tries to minimize the risk of developmentally inappropriate practices by prohibiting direct teacher-child online learning sessions for pre-school children as a means of support – for instance, without proper guidance pre-school teachers may deliver learning instructions using the pedagogy for elementary school students, which is considered developmentally inappropriate for pre-school children.

⁶ We want to highlight that the level of financial support varied across provinces and municipals and the financial support mechanism doesn't represent the practice of the whole province. In fact, as of August, 2020, only Wuhua District government had provided financial support to the private ECE sector in Yunnan.

Box 1. Support measures for private kindergartens by Wuhua District Government in Kunming City, Yunnan Province⁷

Private kindergartens and their teachers have been facing financial difficulties during the pandemic, due to a fall in fee income. In light of this challenge, some local governments introduced assistance measures to support the operation and staff retention of private ECE providers; the Wuhua district government in Kunming City, Yunnan Province demonstrates an example.

The Wuhua district government established a working group led by the government leaders to provide operational and financial support to private kindergartens. The group has conducted research on the impact of the epidemic on private kindergartens, formed a number of support plans, and coordinated financial funds to introduce the ‘Wuhua District Implementation Plan for Supporting Private Kindergartens to Cope with COVID-19’. The main support mechanisms include:

- Allocated CNY 11 million (approximately USD 1.6 million) from special financial funds to support the operation of private kindergartens. According to Bank staff estimates, approximately 30-40 private kindergartens are eligible for the government support, which means that on average, each eligible private kindergarten can receive up to CNY 314,000 (around US\$ 45,000).
- Reduced, exempted, or refunded the social security in the amount of CNY 222,000 (approximately US\$ 31,000) and medical insurance contributions in the amount of CNY 28,000 (approximately US\$ 4,000).
- Provided subsidies for the teachers who returned to the kindergartens as well as lump sum transfer to kindergartens to help reduce the wage bill gap.
- Provided rent subsidy and helped negotiate with the landlords.
- Encouraged financial institutions to increase the credit amount for eligible private kindergartens, reduce the loan interest rates, simplify approval procedures, and expedite the loan process.

Subnational governments issue more detailed guidelines. With the overarching policy guidance and support from the national government, the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education and county education bureaus announced the guidelines for all subsectors of education, including guidelines that specifically focused on the ECE sector. Following the MOE’s guideline, the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education and county education bureaus did not permit direct online teaching instruction to young children but encouraged ECE providers to support children indirectly through remote parental training activities. The guidelines for ECE providers also emphasized upskilling for their teachers. The annex table illustrates the response policy for COVID-19 by each administrative level.

Ensuring the Capacity Building and Well-being of ECE Teachers and Staff

For many pre-schools in Yunnan, the three-month school closures provided an opportunity to upskill their faculty and supporting staff and introduce online training as part of their teacher professional development work plan.

The convergence of both online and offline training. The Kindergarten of Gejiu City Education and Sports Bureau, for instance, designed a varied training agenda for ECE teachers and staff with a large share of

⁷ Wang, Yunnan. 2020. “Wuhua District in Kunming Provides Multiple Support Measures for Private Kindergartens Investing RMB 11 million.” July 3, 2020. Available online in Chinese: <http://society.yunnan.cn/system/2020/07/03/030764675.shtml>

the training sessions carried out online. Although the training was not counted towards the professional development requirement by the local Education Bureaus, it was included in the daily training of kindergartens, which is an important criterion of the performance evaluation for promotion. The training sessions adopted various formats, including online lectures, seminars, and research activities. The training topics included career development, class management, guidance on online platforms, management of the kindergarten environment and personnel. All kindergarten staff participated in the training and their feedback were collected through a WeChat group. Most of activities were organized to provide a near full day of training and Table 1 presents the sample training schedule of kindergartens between February 26, the beginning of the extended school closure after the holiday, and March 6, 2020.

Table 1. The training schedule of the kindergarten of Gejiu City Education and Sports Bureau

Date	Format	Topic	Target group
February 26, 2020	Online lecture	Teacher's activities during the kindergarten closure	All teachers
February 26, 2020	Online research activity	Development of an ECE curriculum for the new semester	Teachers in charge of the curriculum development
February 28, 2020	Work-related activity	Sharing the operations plan of the kindergarten for the spring semester	Teachers overseeing operations plan and homeroom teachers
March 2, 2020	General training	Knowledge of epidemic prevention and control in kindergartens	All teaching staff
	General training	Morning inspection and disinfection	All teaching staff
March 3, 2020	Special lecture	Playing with percussion and rhythm	Teachers from the music group
March 4, 2020	Special lecture	Conflict resolution for children	Teachers from each subject course
March 6, 2020	Work-related activity	Sharing of work plans by each department	Teachers in charge of the work plan and homeroom teachers
March 6, 2020	General training	Music class	Nursing staff

Source: Yunnan Department of Education.

Many of the training activities focus on mutual learning, considering the challenge is new to everyone. For instance, Jiangbin Kindergarten in Kunming organized a series of seminars to share the class activities during the kindergarten closure. Teachers presented their creative educational activities linked to epidemic prevention, such as producing a picture book on disease prevention and making a video clip on the preventative measures. Teachers reflected on their activities and carried out a discussion on the outcomes and areas for improvement.⁸

Support for teachers' psychological well-being. During the pandemic, ECE teachers faced social and economic challenges, and they needed psychological support to maintain mental health. Menga Kindergarten in Gejiu City adjusted their teacher training program to focus on teachers' emotional and mental well-being and skills development. It used platforms such as DingTalk and WeChat group to

⁸ "Jiangbin Kindergarten in Kunming: Sharing of the Theme-based Activities in Jiangbin Kindergarten." Available online in Chinese: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yC6_2g5gkpfm6kH4Hs0xQ.

provide counseling sessions to teachers for their own mental well-being and the chat groups provided teachers tips for helping parents involved in family conflicts during the extended school closures.

Pay attention to supporting staff. The Government Kindergarten of Kunming organized online training for canteen staff through a WeChat group, offering sessions that focused on safe food production and management of canteen facilities. The Lucheng Kindergarten of Chuxiong Prefecture conducted training and tests for all staff on the basic knowledge of COVID-19, health risk assessment, epidemic prevention measures, and emergency drills. Many kindergartens organized staff training to strengthen their professional skills as well as their social and emotional well-being.

Figure 1. The training and testing of response measures conducted by Lucheng Kindergarten



Source: Lucheng Kindergarten

Hands-on support for rural ECE providers. Before the crisis, the rural areas in Yunnan already experienced challenges associated with informality and lack of resources. Hands-on support is particularly important during times of crisis. The collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Save the Children made this approach possible by enabling a mix of specially designed online classes and learning resources for teachers. For example, 25 rural community kindergartens in Weishan County worked with Save the Children to develop a resource package that includes 'Guide to family play during the kindergarten closure', 'Preparation for entering the kindergarten', and 'Brain development and socio-emotional development of young children'. They also organized online training courses to support teachers in teaching personal hygiene and designing learning activities. These learning resources and training activities were tailored according to the local context, which supported teachers on prompt implementation during the pandemic

Figure 2. Learning resources shared through WeChat for teachers in the rural community kindergarten in Weishan County⁹



Source: Save the Children

Provide Parenting Support

As highlighted in the introduction section, the extended stay at home is likely going to exacerbate the existing gaps in the proper child-rearing practice. In addition, children may feel distressed due to COVID-19 and express their anxiety in many forms. Some characteristics of distress and anxiety include frequent crying, difficulty staying still, problems falling asleep and staying asleep, nightmares, clinging to their caregivers, fears of being alone, and being more aggressive or angry or withdrawn. Many kindergartens in Yunnan found ways to support parents and most of the support was provided online through apps such as WeChat or DingTalk. The following section presents some of the practices that were initiated by the kindergartens during kindergarten closures.

Provide accurate public health information. During the early phase of the outbreak, Yunnan Jinniu Kindergarten sent out a letter to all parents through WeChat.¹⁰ In the letter, staff explained what COVID-19 is; typical symptoms, including typical symptoms for children; and ways parents can protect themselves and their family members, referencing the guidelines developed by the World Health Organization. The government kindergarten of Kunming developed videos to instruct parents, through WeChat, on how to teach their children to adopt preventative practices and to exercise at home. Teachers from the Cunjiazhai Village Kindergarten supported parents in teaching their children the importance of handwashing by sharing a digital storybook 'I Don't Want to Wash My Hands' and by providing examples of how interactive reading can be carried out using this book.¹¹ Some kindergartens developed rhythmic songs on

⁹ Figure display text messages from the Weishan Village Kindergarten Group Chat. The text messages were sent by Save the Children staff to notify kindergarten teachers on the date, time, topic and presenter of two example live training workshops on health education and game activity for children.

¹⁰ Shengwei Jinniu Kindergarten. 2020. "Shengwei jinniu youeryuan yufang xinxing guanzhuang bingdu gao jiazhangshu (A Letter to Parents Regarding COVID-19 from the Shengwei Jinniu Kindergarten)." January 23, 2020. Available online in Chinese: <https://www.meipian.cn/2nc1mvl7>.

¹¹ Save the Children International. *Report on the Response to COVID-19 in Qiaojia Early Childhood Education Pilot Program*.

preventative measures against COVID-19, so that parents could teach their children in a fun and interactive way.¹²

Recommend a daily timetable. A detailed timetable can help parents set up a regular routine for their children. The government kindergarten of Kunming recommended different timetables to parents of children of different age groups (junior, middle, and senior). The timetable planned out children’s activities from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., and with each time bracket, there was a brief description of children’s action and guidance for the parents. For example, between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m., children from the junior class were recommended to wash their hands, eat breakfast, and help out with cleaning after eating, read or play quietly; parents were recommended to prepare breakfast, help children establish a good eating habit, and name each food and its purpose.

Figure 3. Parents and children created a daily timetable together based on kindergarten's recommendations



Source: Government kindergarten of Kunming

Leverage digital learning materials. Kindergarten teachers took advantage of mini programs on WeChat, a feature that provides an app-like experience without leaving the WeChat interface. Mini programs such as Eqxiu and Meipian enabled teachers to develop quality materials for parents using a combination of pictures, texts, videos, and interactive features without the need for parents to download and learn new apps. The mini programs required little memory space, which made sharing and access very easy for parents. In Wumaolin Village Kindergarten, kindergarten teachers typed and shared storybooks.¹³ The government kindergarten of Kunming provided demonstration storytelling videos along with the digitalized storybooks, followed by instructions for parents of children of different age groups. For younger children (junior class), these questions were often designed to practice recall and enable discussions. For older children (senior class), instructions focused on reflections.

¹² Yuanzhang youshitong. 2020. “Youer fangyi erge, jianyi jiazhang he youeryuan shouhao (Songs for Children on Preventative Practice Against COVID-19, Designed for Parents and Kindergarten Staff).” April 20, 2020. Available online in Chinese: https://www.sohu.com/a/389262939_100261595.

¹³ Humana People to People. 2020. “Qinzi zhuti huodong, gongban haizi chixu chengzhang (Thematic Parent-child Activities, Support Children’s Development Together).” March 23, 2020. Available online in Chinese: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aj_YD3aGPlhZQMYV-jm9MQ.

Box 2. “Online kindergarten” activities by the Second Kindergarten in the Fengtai District of Beijing¹⁴

While the MOE doesn’t encourage distance teaching instruction for pre-school children, some of the kindergartens in Beijing maintained a communication channel between teachers and children. After the demand survey from parents and children, the Second Kindergarten in the Fengtai District of Beijing decided to open an online kindergarten which supports the parent-child interaction and communication between teachers and children. The teachers created a WeChat group for all the caregivers and children in the class and designed various forms of activities. This online interaction was well received by the parents and children. It helped children to connect frequently with their teachers and friends, and met the needs of their physical and socio-emotional development during school closures. The four types of activities delivered by the Kindergarten are:

1. Setting up a weekly short video call with each child to check in on the child's wellbeing at home.
2. Daily group chat with all children to discuss a specific topic and conduct game activities.
3. Maintaining a Q&A hotline in which the parents can consult any child-rearing and education issues.
4. Sharing of homemade videos displaying children's artworks and performances at any time.

Share healthy kindergarten recipes. Lucheng Kindergarten from Chuxiong Prefecture shared popular kindergarten recipes with parents through WeChat. Each recipe contained a detailed step-by-step guidance and pictures, suggesting parents and children to prepare the meals together. The purpose of sharing the recipes was to not only support parents in providing healthy nutritious meals to their children, but also to encourage parents to bond with their children through daily activities.

Promote hands-on mini projects and the sharing of parenting activities. Storytelling and reading activities promoted children’s cognitive and language development. Teachers from Shiyan Village Kindergarten helped guide parents to complete an art project with their children, in which children used leaves and sticks to make an animal drawing.¹⁵ Teachers from the government kindergarten of Kunming instructed parents to make a cable car together. Teachers from village kindergartens that are supported by Humana People to People asked parents to complete a science project with their children, in which children planted a vegetable and made daily observations.¹⁶ Teachers encouraged parents to record videos of them completing the activities with their children together and provided timely feedback.

¹⁴ The second kindergarten in the Fengtai District of Beijing. 2020. “Voices from the front line of kindergartens fighting the epidemic: “Online kindergarten”, changes the way to accompany you.” Available online in Chinese: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?_biz=MzA5OTE5NjgwNg==&mid=2650973250&idx=1&sn=a16bd4eb89a09aa45a9b83a19997dabd&chksm=8b700eabbc0787bd04fd1818a9f2ecb1fe2cf9937b01cb60d8996f19ebd971d5769771f0ff0c&scene=21#wechat_redirect

¹⁵ Save the Children International. *Report on the Response to COVID-19 in Qiaojia Early Childhood Education Pilot Program.*

¹⁶ Humana People to People. 2020. “Qinzi zhuti huodong, gongban haizi chixu chengzhang (Thematic Parent-child Activities, Support Children’s Development Together).” March 13, 2020. Available online in Chinese: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aj_YD3aGPIhZQMYV-jm9MQ.

Figure 4. Children and parents from Shiyan Village Kindergarten used leaves and sticks to make animal drawings



Source: Save the Children

Set up weekly themes and work plans. The public kindergartens in Kunming developed weekly teaching plans for teachers to implement, with one set of teaching plans for children of each age group, and adjusted their plans based on feedback collected from parents and teachers. The parents sent their feedback form in the WeChat group, and teachers shared their comments during weekly online training. For rural ECE centers supported by Humana People to People, the Kunming office staff designed weekly topics for teachers to implement.¹⁷ For example, the themes for weeks 1–4 were artwork, storytelling, games, and science, respectively. With each theme, the teachers provided a set of activities to the parents.

Support parents of children who are transitioning from kindergartens to primary schools. For children who are in their senior year of kindergarten and are expected to be going to primary school in the second half of the year, Wuhuaqu Kindergarten delivered 10 online seminars to provide guidance to parents on this topic.¹⁸ Teachers from Wuhuaqu Kindergarten and Wuhuaqu Wenlin Primary School provided the seminars. The coordinating team also invited a mother to share her personal experiences in helping her child transition to primary school education. The seminars focused on explaining the differences between kindergarten activities and primary school education, describing typical difficulties experienced by young children when transitioning, and teaching parents how to include specific practices into their daily interactions with their children to help them transition.

Support parents of children with special needs. Teachers from Kunming University Special Education Center designed targeted in-home therapy plans for every child and provided one-to-one instructions.¹⁹ All special education centers in China shared the online seminar classes that were developed by China Disabled Persons' Federation, in which the seminar classes focused on in-home therapy to children with disabilities.²⁰

¹⁷ Humana People to People. 2020. "Qinzi zhuti huodong, gongban haizi chixu chengzhang (Thematic Parent-child Activities, Support Children's Development Together)." March 13, 2020. Available online in Chinese:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aj_YD3aGPIhZQMYV-jm9MQ.

¹⁸ Wuhua Kindergarten free online seminar on Supporting Children Transition from Kindergarten to Primary School Education. Available online: <http://www.kmwhzx.com/h-col-188.html>.

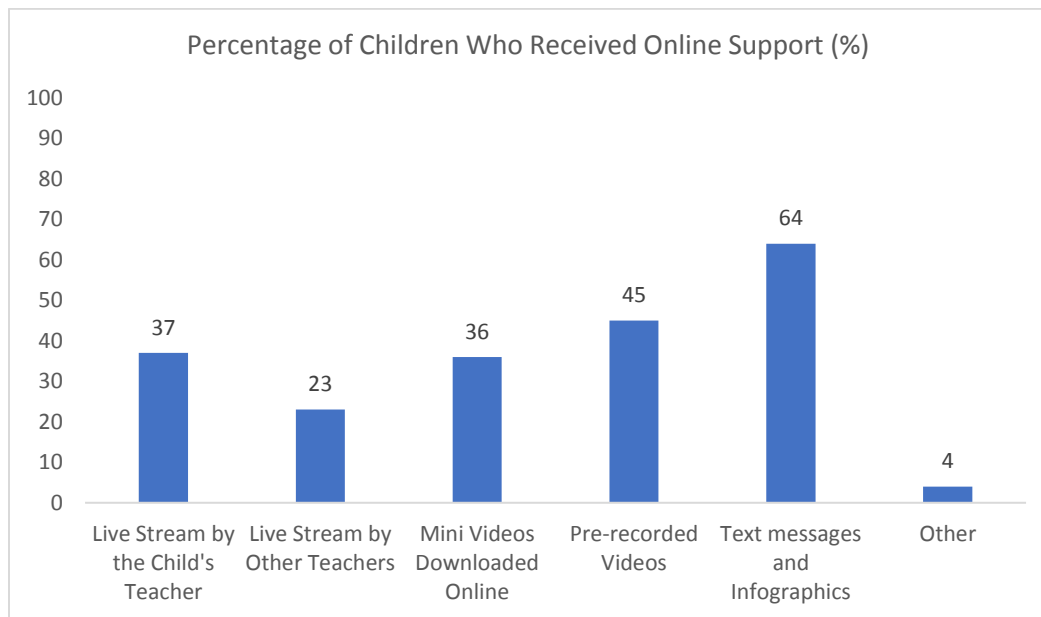
¹⁹ Kunming University Special Education Center. 2020. "Jiayuan xinlianxin, kangyi niwo ta – kunyuan fuyou kangyi zai xingdong xilie baodao (yi) (Kunming University Special Education Center on Practices in Response to COVID-19)." February 22, 2020. Available online in Chinese: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QiXs9lf-HnPT6S1BTxQb-Q>.

²⁰ China Disabled Persons' Federation. Available online in Chinese: <http://www.cdppf.org.cn/stzx/cjetkfxlsp/>.

Results of the Distance Support for Parents and Children

Based on the recent survey from CIEFR, approximately 57 percent of the sampled children and their families from Yunnan province received online parenting support from the kindergartens during closure. Common support mechanisms included sharing of childrearing tips via text messages and infographics (64 percent households that received parenting support), sharing of childrearing tips via mini videos (45 percent), and live streamed guidance from teachers (36 percent), and pre-recorded videos that help guide activities at home (23 percent), as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Form of Online Activities that Children Received During Kindergarten Closure



Source: China Institute for Educational Finance Research, Peking University

The survey also shows that children whose parents received online support during kindergartens closures were associated with higher child development outcomes compared to those who did not (Annex 2). Correlation analysis, after controlling for a series of child and household characteristics, suggests that children who received online activities scored higher in all 9 domains and is 0.11 Standard Deviation (SD) higher in the CeHCI overall index compared to children whose parents didn't receive such support. This difference in child development outcomes is larger for younger children and children from rural and poorer households. In terms of the modalities of support, live streaming guidance by the children's own teachers (0.12 SD), live streaming guidance by other teachers (0.03 SD), pre-recorded sessions (0.06 SD), and texts and infographics (0.05 SD) were associated higher child development outcome with average gains expressed in precedencies. Detailed results are exhibited in Annex 3.

Preparation for Kindergarten Reopening

As the newly reported cases of COVID-19 transmission in China declined significantly after February 2020, provincial education authorities gradually announced school reopening dates and plans.²¹ The Education Department of Yunnan Province issued an announcement on the gradual reopening of kindergartens and special education schools, which specified that, conditional upon meeting all government requirements, kindergartens and special education centers can reopen gradually from May 25, 2020.²² The announcement mandated all kindergartens and special education centers to (a) arrange different timetables for children of different classes so that they enter and leave at different time slots, (b) implement strict preventive and control measures, and (c) teach children preventative practices against COVID-19 on the orientation day after reopening.

Vetting Process

The decision to reopen kindergartens/special education schools is decentralized at the provincial level with general guidance set at the national level from the MOE. In the national guidelines issued on February 28, 2020, the MOE requested adequate vetting against public health risk and proper action plans to ensure readiness at school level. The vetting processes include the following:

- **Location-based vetting.** A key consideration for the province to reopen schools was the total time that has elapsed since the first day of zero local transmission or locally confirmed cases in the province—typically 28 days, twice the 14-day self-isolation period recommended by health authorities after risky exposure.
- **Individual-based vetting.** It required kindergartens to collect information from students and teachers regarding their travel history and health condition in the past 14 days, and based on the information collected, to determine whether a high-risk individual will need to require additional time away from school.

Establish and Reinforce Public Health Protocols

The National Health Commission and the MOE established public health protocols specifically for kindergartens.²³ The Department of Education of Yunnan Province required each kindergarten to

²¹ East Asia and Pacific Education Team. 2020. *Response to COVID-19 : Preparing for School Re-Opening – The Case of China (English)*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/743891587996521873/Response-to-COVID-19-Preparing-for-School-Re-Opening-The-Case-of-China>.

²² Department of Education of Yunnan Province. “Notice of Yunnan Education Department on Orderly Opening of Kindergarten and Special Education Schools.” Available online in Chinese: <https://jyt.yn.gov.cn/web/38d5f8d6af024bd0abe28cc484b18af0/91ea39945e5144c19c9552c7514904d7.html>.

²³ Ministry of Education and National Health Commission. 2020. “Guanyu yinfa zhongxiaoxuexiao he tuoyoujigou xinguan feiyan yiqing fangkong jishu fangan de tongzhi (Technical Strategies on preventative measures against COVID-19 for primary school, middle school, child-care and kindergarten Institutions).” May 7, 2020. Available online in Chinese: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2020-05/08/content_5509877.htm.

reinforce the protocols before and after kindergartens reopening. Box 3 illustrates an example of how these health protocols are being implemented in a local kindergarten in Kunming City, Yunnan Province.²⁴

Before Kindergarten Reopening

- Complete **individual-based vetting** by collecting information from students and teachers regarding their health conditions and travel history for the past 14 days and decide if the person will require additional time away from school.
- Ensure that each kindergarten is directly linked to a specific health facility and a specific disease control center.
- Establish a prevention plan, contingency plan, rapid response mechanism, and a new daily routine.
- Stock up **key supplies** including thermometers, disinfectants, soaps, hand sanitizers, masks, and so on.
- Provide training to all kindergarten staff on preventative measures against COVID-19.
- Thoroughly **clean and disinfect** all areas on campus and ensure air flow in indoor spaces.
- Designate a **space for temporary isolation** that is equipped with toiletries in case presumed cases occur on campus.
- Sensitize school personnel and parents to key **preventative measures**.

After Kindergarten Reopening

- Practice **social distancing** whenever possible (for example, children of different classes should enter and leave the kindergarten at different times of the day to avoid clustering, cancel large group activities, and take the stairs when possible).
- Mandate all kindergarten staff to wear face masks at all times; children are not advised to wear face masks.
- Routinely carry out **simple health screening** three times a day, monitor instances of **high-risk symptoms** and health-related **absence**, and provide **daily updates** to local authorities. All staff and children with relevant symptoms are not allowed to enter the kindergarten.
- **Manage access to kindergarten.** Anyone who is not a staff or student of the kindergarten is not allowed to enter.
- **Disinfect and maintain a daily record of areas cleaned.** For all frequently used public facilities, such as doorknobs, water fountains, stair railings, and bed fences, surfaces should be wiped with effective chlorine-based disinfectants. Children's personal items, such as towels and toys, should be soaked in chlorine-based disinfectants for 30 minutes, rinsed with clean water, and dried in a ventilated area.

²⁴ Jinniu Kindergarten. 2020. "Shengwei jinniu youeryuan fuxueqian zhijiazhang de yifengxin (A Letter from Jinniu Kindergarten to all Parents Regarding Kindergarten Reopening). May 30, 2020. Available online in Chinese: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/urlvAsF2_EDiwnIRWIXwOw.

- **Ensure food safety.** Each person should have his/her own eating utensils. The utensils should be disinfected regularly (that is, by boiling them for 15 minutes, using a disinfecting cabinet, or soaking them in chlorine-based disinfectants for 30 minutes, and rinsing them off with water). All cafeteria staff should disinfect their work clothes regularly.
- Ensure air flow in all indoor spaces, ventilate at least three times a day, for more than 30 minutes each time. If the kindergarten is using air conditioning, should ensure air conditioning safety.
- Sensitize the students on **good personal hygiene practices** (that is, dissuade children from touching public facilities such as doorknobs and elevator buttons and encourage them to wash their hands properly).

Contingency Plan

- If staff or children develop relevant symptoms before entering the kindergarten, they should notify the kindergarten and follow the guidelines to either stay at home or seek medical treatment.
- If staff or children develop relevant symptoms at the kindergarten, they should immediately report to the first person responsible in the kindergarten, practice self-isolation in the temporary isolation room, and seek medical treatment at the health facility that is directly linked to the kindergarten. They should avoid taking public transportation (that is, bus or underground metro) to the health facility and should always wear a face mask while travelling.
- If staff or children are diagnosed with COVID-19, the kindergarten should immediately enforce the rapid response mechanism.
- After successful recovery, the kindergarten should provide supporting medical documents to the local health bureau.

Box 3. New Morning Routine in Jinniu Kindergarten After Reopening

On May 30, Jinniu Kindergarten sent out a letter to all parents through WeChat regarding kindergarten reopening. In the letter, the staff announced the school-opening dates for children of different classes, and outlined all requirements and preparation work for parents to send their children back to school. Staff also introduced a new morning and pick-up routine.

New Morning Routine

1. The parent and the child wait in their designated 'waiting area', standing 1 meter away from other parent-child dyads, waiting for their time slot (senior class (7:30–7:45), Montessori class (7:45–8:00), middle class (8:00–8:15); and junior class (8:15–8:30)).
2. The parent shows the staff their 'Yunnan Health QR Code'. The parent needs to report their travel history and health conditions online through the Yunnan health app in advance. The app then assigns green (low-risk), yellow (medium-risk) or red (high-risk) codes based on the information provided.
3. The parent receives body temperature check. Other parent-child dyads wait in the gridded line, where the grids are 1 m apart.
4. The child receives his/her body temperature check from a contact-free thermometer.
5. The parent and the child wait in line for the health care staff to provide the morning health check.

Figure 7. Staff from Yunnan Jinniu Kindergarten demonstrating the new morning health check procedures



Source: Yunnan Jinniu Kindergarten

6. Health care staff provides morning health check while the parent waits 1 meter apart.
7. After the morning health check, the parent passes the morning health check card to the teacher, and the teacher gives the pick-up card to the parent.
8. The child sanitizes his/her hands, takes his/her mask off and gives the mask to the parent. The child enters the kindergarten without a mask.

Support the Transition from Home-Based Schooling

The kindergartens in Yunnan adopted various approaches to help children in managing the transition from home-based learning and readjusting to kindergartens.

Work with parents to help children transition to normal school schedule. Teachers of Jiangbin Kindergarten in Kunming conducted online surveys and meetings with parents to understand children's current status at home. It helped the teachers to design online courses before the reopening to support the transition process of children. The parents of Xinjie Lanjingling Kindergarten and Wuhua Jiangbin Kindergarten have also been sharing the health information of their children with class teachers. They reported the body temperature and physical condition of their children every day. The continuous monitoring and updates by parents helped the kindergarten to develop the safety protocols and class activities after the reopening. Jinniu Kindergarten also sent the announcement to parents advising them to (a) end the extended break by summarizing the activities during the break, and reminding children that the new semester began; (b) adjust the activity plan at home according to the class schedule of kindergarten; and (c) let children dress and wash themselves to develop self-reliance and good habits.

Use back-to-school orientation and special class to support children's adjustment. The Department of Education of Yunnan Province stressed the importance of the first class after reopening. It suggested that the class be designed to help children better understand the epidemic and emergency drills. The Government Kindergarten of Jianshui County invited health professionals from local hospitals to share professional knowledge of the virus and its prevention with kindergarten teachers and staff. The Government Kindergarten of Honghe Prefecture introduced children to the correct method for wearing masks through a series of game activities. Jingkai Kindergarten conducted learning activities focusing on the themes of life, courage, and hero, using videos, drawing, and storytelling to teach students the importance of epidemic control.

Some teachers also found that children are having difficulty adjusting to normal preschool activities after reopening. For example, children are not engaging with others, forgetting the rules of kindergarten, and having a hard time carrying out class activities. To support their adaptation, Jiangbin Kindergarten set the

first week as the transition period, and mainly conducted discussion, games, and other activities to guide children to reflect the previous kindergarten activities and class rules to help them adjust. Some kindergartens also encouraged children to share their experiences during the school closures and their feelings on coming back to the kindergarten as a means of psychological support.

Figure 8. The back-to-school orientation of the government kindergarten in Honghe Prefecture



Source: The government kindergarten in Honghe Prefecture.

Lessons Learned

Guidelines from the national level with decentralized action plans that reflect the local context will help provide directions to service providers in times of crisis. With effective guidelines on epidemic prevention and control, the central government supported the coherent responses and minimized contradictions among jurisdictions. All levels of subnational governments also undertook proactive measures that align the local context and priorities. A clear assignment and understanding of responsibilities among different actors were highlighted during the process to minimize the crisis management failures.

During extended period of school closures, teachers can benefit from professional development and mental health support that are provided by their employers and by the government. During the school closures, both online and offline training helped the ECE staff in Yunnan in improving their skills, as well as ensuring their psychological well-being. The customized resources provided to the rural kindergarten teachers equipped teachers to better support the parents.

Governments have a role in maintaining the supply of private kindergartens. During extended school closures, teachers may experience pay-cuts or even layoffs. Unlike public kindergartens, where there was more guarantee of government support, private kindergartens were more likely to face budget constraints which led to a high turnover of teachers. The practices of Wuhua District Government demonstrated that governments can help private service providers retain teachers through direct fund transfers to the providers, reductions in government taxes, fees and rent, and access to cheaper loans.

Providing parenting support promotes children's wellbeing and active learning at home. Extended school closures highlighted the importance of parenting skills and provided ECD services an opportunity to strengthen their role in supporting parents. Some notable practices from Yunnan include (a) providing daily timetables that help parents set up a regular daily routine for young children, (b) sharing hands-on mini projects and meal preparations that enabled quality interactions; (c) sharing digital visual aids such as posters from the World Health Organization and learning materials such as storybooks, including

simplified materials designed for children with special needs; and (d) organizing online group chats to children who are transitioning from preschool to primary education. COVID-19 also affected children's mental health, as they may express anxiety in many ways. Teachers should support parents to help their children in coping with any of these symptoms and navigating the complicated emotions they may be facing.

Carefully plan for kindergarten reopening. The carefully developed reopening plans not only ensured that children return to school safely, but also that they could transition back to kindergarten routines smoothly. Although the decision to reopen is decentralized, the MOE and the National Health Commission provided clear guidelines and protocols for kindergartens to implement before and after school reopening. Each kindergarten was linked to a specific health facility. All kindergartens implemented individual- and location-based vetting through the online health app. These measures were important in ensuring children's safe return to ECE. In addition to implementing preventative measures, reopening plans also included measures to support children in the transition from home-based learning to ECE. Teachers worked with parents to provide supporting activities at home and designed specific activities to help children adjust.

Annex 1: ECE Policy in Response to COVID-19 from Each Administrative Level

Administrative Level	Authority	Policy Summary
National Level	State Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a special committee, Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism, which played the coordinating role among the different departments and made control policies and priorities in response to new developments Outlined preventative measures for parents and caregivers to protect young children Suggested preventative and control practices for kindergartens during school closure and after school reopening
	Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formed guidelines on the <i>Disrupted Classes, Undisrupted Learning Initiative</i> Worked with local governments to (1) determine the school reopening date by monitoring the regional outbreaks; (2) develop sound reopening plans; and (3) set different reopening dates by the grade level Developed measures to provide care and support to children of front-line staff and left-behind children from rural areas
	Ministry of Civil Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed the emergency fund for distressed families
	Ministry of Education, National Health Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided a full technical plan on prevention and control practices for kindergartens based on the general guidelines of the State Council
	Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Released early education development funds in advance
	State Administration for Market Regulation, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasized food safety procedures for kindergartens
Provincial Level	Provincial Education Departments	<p>Focused on developing the regional guidelines and implementation scheme based on the national policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formed the COVID-19 prevention and control emergency plans for the kindergartens Strengthened the coordination mechanism between kindergartens, local health commission, disease control centers, and health facilities Supported kindergartens to carry out staff training programs, focusing on preventative and control measures in response to COVID-19 Worked with the prefecture/county governments to provide financial support to private kindergartens

<p>Prefecture/County Level</p>	<p>Prefecture/County Education Bureaus</p>	<p>Supported kindergartens to implement the guidelines from the national and provincial government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraged kindergartens to develop sound work plans, clarify roles and responsibilities, continuously monitor the health status of children and staff during school closures, and prepare for the reopening • Screened all kindergartens before reopening, ensuring that all reopening kindergartens met the government’s requirements • Supported kindergartens to conduct a back-to-school orientation to provide staff and student training on preventative measures against COVID-19
--------------------------------	--	--

Annex 2: Correlations between distance parenting support during kindergarten closures and child development outcomes

	(1) PH	(2) GVC	(3) ATL	(4) NAC	(5) FL-R	(6) FL-W	(7) CK	(8) SED	(9) P	(10) OVERALL	(11) N
Panel A: Full Sample											
Online	0.073	0.103	0.084	0.075	0.077	0.051	0.111	0.085	0.067	0.114	35756
Support (1=Yes)	(0.010) ***	(0.009) ***	(0.009) ***	(0.008) ***	(0.009) ***	(0.009) ***	(0.009) ***	(0.010) ***	(0.010) ***	(0.009) ***	
Panel B: Children Ages 3 to 4											
Online	0.125	0.120	0.103	0.201	0.148	0.086	0.192	0.200	0.140	0.213	7686
Support (1=Yes)	(0.024) ***	(0.022) ***	(0.023) ***	(0.026) ***	(0.020) ***	(0.018) ***	(0.026) ***	(0.026) ***	(0.024) ***	(0.021) ***	
Panel C: Boys											
Online	0.074	0.117	0.098	0.088	0.107	0.075	0.140	0.098	0.058	0.136	18512
Support (1=Yes)	(0.015) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.012) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.014) ***	(0.014) ***	(0.015) ***	(0.012) ***	
Panel D: Girls											
Online	0.072	0.089	0.068	0.061	0.044	0.026	0.079	0.071	0.076	0.090	17244
Support (1=Yes)	(0.014) ***	(0.012) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.012) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.013) **	(0.012) ***	(0.014) ***	(0.015) ***	(0.012) ***	
Panel E: Children Residing in the Rural Areas											
Online	0.064	0.145	0.119	0.087	0.084	0.058	0.144	0.092	0.083	0.134	20752
Support (1=Yes)	(0.014) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.012) ***	(0.012) ***	(0.012) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.013) ***	(0.012) ***	
Panel F: Children from Poor Households (Annual Household Income < RMB 30,000)											
Online	0.079	0.191	0.132	0.082	0.094	0.076	0.166	0.095	0.090	0.154	11153
Support (1=Yes)	(0.019) ***	(0.021) ***	(0.020) ***	(0.016) ***	(0.017) ***	(0.017) ***	(0.019) ***	(0.019) ***	(0.018) ***	(0.017) ***	

Table displays the regression results. The dependent variables are the Chinese Early Human Capability Index (CeHCI) subscales and the independent variable is a dummy variable which takes the value of 1 if the child received online support from his/her kindergarten during their extended stay at home. The following control variables are included: child's age, child's sex, whether the child is from an ethnic minority group, mother's education, whether the child resides in the urban city, county center or in the rural areas, and the respondent's relationship to the child. The outcome variables of Columns (1) to (9) are the 9 domains of the CeHCI: Physical Health, General Verbal Communication, Approaches to Learning, Numeracy and Concepts, Formal Literacy - Reading, Formal Literacy - Writing, Cultural Knowledge, Social and Emotional Development, and Perseverance. In Column (10), the outcome variable is the summary measure of development across all 9 CeHCI domains. All dependent variables are standardized using the mean and SD of the 2020 sample who did not receive any online support during school closures. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels are as follows: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Annex 3: Correlations between type of distance parenting support during kindergarten closures and child development outcomes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	PH	GVC	ATL	NAC	FL-R	FL-W	CK	SED	P	OVERALL
Live Streams by the Child's Teacher	0.100 (0.014) ***	0.039 (0.012) ***	0.048 (0.013) ***	0.051 (0.012) ***	0.098 (0.012) ***	0.097 (0.012) ***	0.062 (0.013) ***	0.102 (0.014) ***	0.066 (0.014) ***	0.119 (0.012) ***
Live Streams by Other Teachers	0.032 (0.017) *	0.010 (0.015)	0.003 (0.016)	0.021 (0.014)	0.053 (0.015) ***	0.047 (0.015) ***	-0.039 (0.015) **	0.008 (0.017)	-0.014 (0.018)	0.029 (0.014) **
Pre-recorded Sessions	0.046 (0.014) ***	0.038 (0.012) ***	0.019 (0.013)	0.037 (0.012) ***	0.058 (0.012) ***	0.029 (0.012) **	0.052 (0.013) ***	0.048 (0.014) ***	0.032 (0.014) **	0.060 (0.012) ***
Mini Videos Recorded Online	-0.002 (0.013)	0.017 (0.011)	0.032 (0.012) ***	0.041 (0.011) ***	-0.015 (0.011)	-0.012 (0.011)	0.038 (0.012) ***	0.006 (0.013)	0.022 (0.013) *	0.013 (0.011)
Texts and infographics	0.013 (0.011)	0.059 (0.010) ***	0.040 (0.010) ***	0.027 (0.009) ***	0.026 (0.010) ***	0.002 (0.010)	0.059 (0.010) ***	0.041 (0.011) ***	0.047 (0.012) ***	0.046 (0.010) ***
Other Activities	0.035 (0.035)	-0.032 (0.031)	0.001 (0.032)	-0.018 (0.029)	0.070 (0.030) **	0.033 (0.031)	0.017 (0.032)	0.024 (0.035)	0.026 (0.036)	0.037 (0.030)
<i>N</i>	35756	35756	35756	35756	35756	35756	35756	35756	35756	35756

Table displays the regression results of child development outcomes on online support. For each support activity, the variable takes the value of 1 if the child received the specific type of online support during kindergarten closure and 0 otherwise. The following control variables are included: child's age, child's sex, whether the child is from an ethnic minority group, mother's education, whether the child resides in the urban city, county center or in the rural areas, and the respondent's relationship to the child. The outcome variables of Columns (1) to (9) are the 9 domains of the CeHCI: Physical Health, General Verbal Communication, Approaches to Learning, Numeracy and Concepts, Formal Literacy - Reading, Formal Literacy - Writing, Cultural Knowledge, Social and Emotional Development, and Perseverance. In Column (10), the outcome variable is the summary measure of development across all 9 CeHCI domains. All dependent variables are standardized using the mean and SD of the 2020 sample who did not receive any Online Support from the kindergartens during closure. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Significance levels are as follows: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.