

March 25, 2020

*This note provides guidance for World Bank teams helping client countries mitigate adverse impacts of COVID19 pandemic through an education-specific response. It also offers recommendations for government responses that minimize or prevent loss of learning while ensuring safety of all students. This note is meant for discussion and subject to change.*

## How does COVID19 impact education?

While COVID19 is primarily affecting public health, spillover effects can already be observed in education, stemming largely from extended school closures. The following are among the key issues to consider:

**To date, COVID19-driven school closures have impacted over one billion students.**<sup>1</sup> By current World Bank information gathering, at the time of writing this note, 150 countries<sup>2</sup> are reporting school closures. These numbers have increased rapidly since late February.

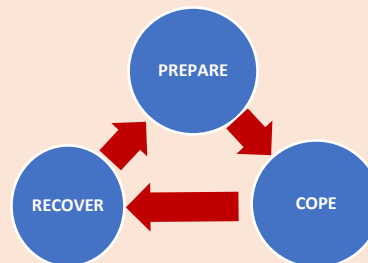
**School closure decisions have to balance different factors.** On one hand, despite the low rates of infection among children, school closures are a critical pillar of the social distancing tools to mitigate the spread of the disease and avoid an acceleration of cases that will put a strain on health services. Its effectiveness as a measure to slow down the spread of contagion will depend on the exact timing of the closures, the age structure of the population and the length of the closure. Recent guidance from the United States Center for Disease Control (US-CDC) suggests that school closures do serve a purpose, in particular if COVID-19 cases are school-based, to allow for decontamination and contact tracing. It also recognizes its importance as a tool to increase social distance. The reports note that a closure of 4 to 8 weeks might be required in case of substantial community spread.

On the other hand, extended interrupted education that disengage students from the learning process has the potential cost of reversing gains in learning results. An even higher cost comes from the disengagement of students with learning challenges (academic, socio-economic, students with special/diverse educational needs or persons with disabilities) who may not effectively cope with remote learning strategies or cannot access the information (see next section). Where school feeding is the norm, closed schools might preclude students getting school meals unless alternative arrangements are in place. In secondary schools, longer school closures could result in an increased risk of dropout for youth, particularly from lower income

### Mitigating Impact of Emergencies on Education

The process of addressing crises in the education sector seems cyclical. Countries begin “preparing”, a response in anticipation of a known or unknown crisis. When amidst the crisis, they move to “coping” and thus, implementing measures to minimize the negative impact. This can include introducing protocols for screenings in schools, rolling out hygiene practice campaigns, imposing school closures, offering distance learning, using closed schools for emergency purposes, etc. As the emergency phase dissipates, communities move into a “recovery” mode and governments implement policies and measures to regain lost time. The approaches may include adjustments to the academic calendar, prioritizing grades preparing for standard examinations, continuing with distance learning in parallel to schools, etc. Those countries that have shown greater resilience in repeated crises are those who were able to benefit from lesson learned and use the momentum to re-prepare, investing and reinforcing systems going forward.

*A Cyclical Approach to education in emergencies*



<sup>1</sup> UNESCO: Coronavirus Impacts Education <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>

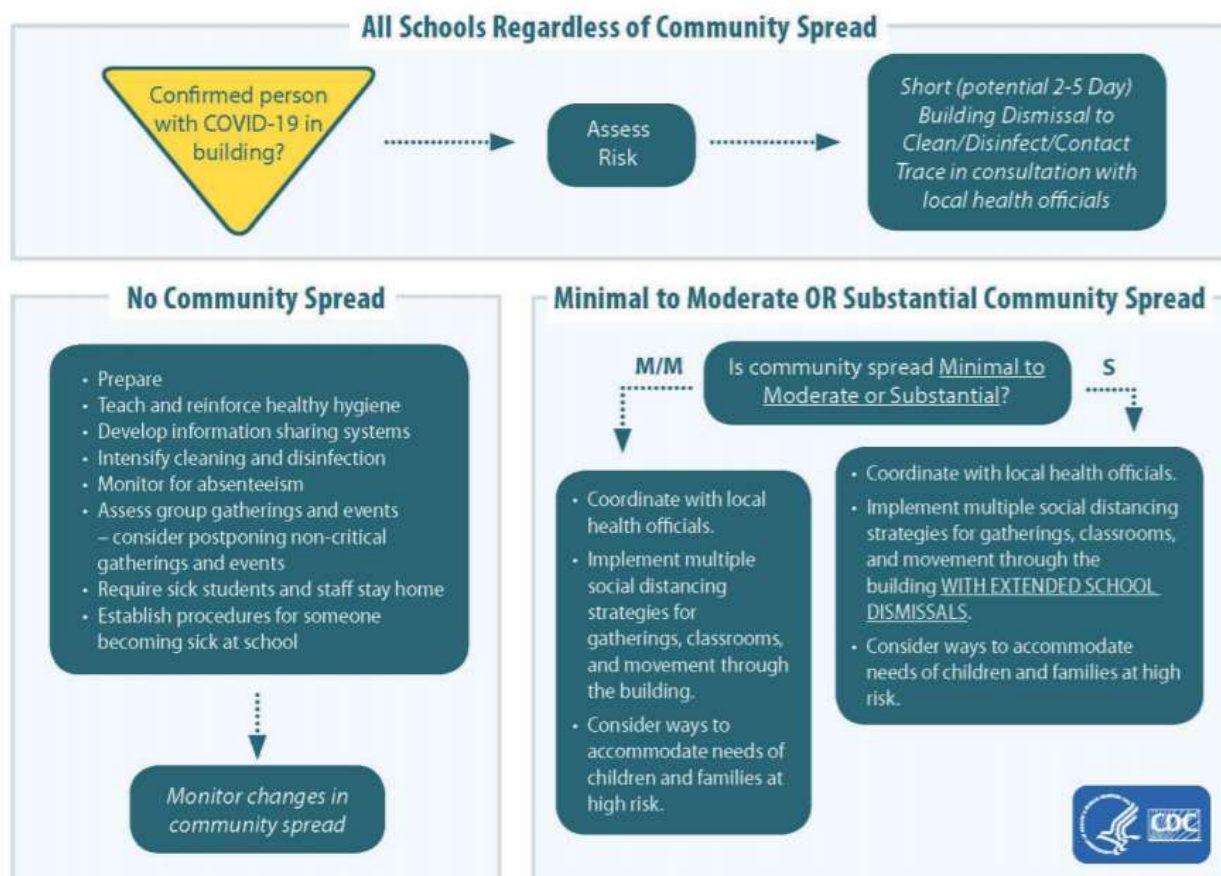
<sup>2</sup> Information crowd-sourced from teams across the World Bank

groups. School closings also impact labor supply as they increase the burden on parents, who need to stay home or find new arrangements if children have to stay at home (even worse if playground and children centers are closed).

Differences in the weights given to these aspects influence authorities' choices of if and when to close schools. While some countries closed schools out of abundant caution (many in Africa), a select few (the UK, New Zealand, Mexico, Switzerland) delayed closing until recently. It remains to be seen what effects the various policies will have on the virus spread (*Singapore has kept schools open.*)

In countries where the breakout is isolated, some governments have opted to **close schools in the immediate location or region** or schools have self-selected themselves to close as a precautionary measure or to sanitize before returning kids to the classroom. **Portugal, Spain, and India** are examples of countries who used regional closures as an attempt to contain or slow the spread. The figure below provides a decision tree that governments may find useful in consider various policy decisions.

### Decision Process for Closing Schools



Source: Center for Disease Control: Considerations for School Closure

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/considerations-for-school-closure.pdf>

**Indirect impact of pandemic.** Apart from its direct impact on schooling, the pandemic impacts include the possible use of school facilities as make-shift hospitals, as in some low-infrastructure rural areas the school may be the only public building available. That may cause lengthier disruption of education services making the building unavailable for education purposes. Also, as part of the coping mechanisms (discussed below) the practice of offering alternative services of remote learning may work better for those students in households with better connectivity and with higher initial digital skills. This leaves those already

disadvantaged further behind, so school closures with the inappropriate system coping mechanisms, might imply an exacerbation in inequality in education.

## How can education mitigate COVID19's impact?

### A. Enhancing Preparedness while keeping schools open

**Enforcing and supporting preventive actions in schools.** Most governments rolled out awareness campaigns through schools (and other platforms) on hygiene and sanitation to students. In **Afghanistan**, the Ministries of Education and Health launched a hygiene good practices awareness campaign through schools, television, and social media platforms. In **Finland**, while most schools are closed and remote learning and teaching is taking place with the support of educational technology, kindergartens continue operating with preventive measures and are open for families who need childcare. In addition, primary schools must organize contact teaching for those grades 1-3 students whose parents work in critical positions (such as health, education, logistics, supermarkets etc.). In **Russia**, Moscow city and Moscow oblast moved to a free regime of school attendance. If families want to stop attending schools, they are free to do so. The compensation is providing distance education through technology. In **Ethiopia**, the Ministry of Education distributed communication material for students and parents on how to reduce risk of exposure.

In low capacity countries, (those that battled the Ebola outbreak in 2014-15 can serve as examples), governments can **use the education physical and human resources to address the epidemic**. Given their level of education and profile within communities of low literacy, educators can serve as advocates and resources that would increase awareness and provide guidance. **For example, in Liberia and Sierra Leone** teachers were trained on protocols for screening of children for fever once schools resumed. They also benefited from teachers expanding awareness about the causes of infection and symptoms.

**Limit physical contact by reducing social and extra-curricular activities.** Many countries restricted or cancelled extra-curricular, athletic, or community activities as a measure of reducing physical contact. This has been rolled out by individual schools, regionally, or nationally by governments looking to enforce social distancing. In countries across Europe and the Middle East, governments have enforced a ban on gatherings with large numbers of participants, including sporting and non-essential academic events. For example, in **Belarus**, where schools remain open, social interactions are limited– including also mass gatherings and interactions during school breaks.

### B. Using distance learning to mitigate loss of learning

While schools are closed, many countries have turned to distance learning as a means of mitigating for lost time in continuing education services. Some countries are simply putting resources on their website, and making available more products, but not necessarily online classes. Others, like **Spain**, are asking teachers to prepare online content and offer online classes. Infrastructure and familiarity with the tools seem to be driving successes (and challenges) of delivering learning. **China** for example, with robust connectivity, is offering distance learning successfully whereas others with limited penetration of internet, cell phone, or television (e.g. **Vietnam, Mongolia**) are finding it difficult to reach all students equally. In addition, many countries have challenges in ensuring that education services are equally accessible for employees/students with disabilities.

Providing resource to work at home can now be done using different technological options. But access to connectivity and different type of devices and for example ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities vary widely across income levels. **Hence, a key challenge is not creating further inequalities.** Some African countries (**Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Botswana, Gambia**) can start preparing now as there is reasonable school connectivity and there are devices (tablets) for kids to take home. In most countries, however, students have some **access to mobile devices and optimizing accessible solutions to those should be the main emphasis.** Although there is plenty of digital content available, some even open source, a key challenge for the coming weeks is to prepare pedagogical material to be available in a structured way such that could capture the attention of all students.

**Partnering with some private sector providers** to provide content already developed is a useful option to explore. A key element in the discussion of using smartphones is establishing partnerships with telecom providers to allow for **zero-charges for content downloaded from the Ministry of Education** (or any agency that hosts learning resources platforms). TV, which can use captions to support various language learners and students with disabilities or sign language interpreters to reach deaf learners, and radio options can still be used but they tend to be better suited for lower grades (and should be prepared thinking of children and caregivers). Many countries have material available that can be rebroadcasted.

In addition to infrastructure and connectivity, teachers' and administrators' familiarity with the tools and processes are also key factors in providing distance learning. **Singapore** is currently rolling out training for teachers on provision of classes online in anticipation of school closings. Some countries like **Lebanon** have opted to send kids home with lessons as homework, promoting independent distance learning with help from peers and parents, that would then be reinforced once school resumed.

See more details in the *Rapid Response Briefing Note: [Remote Learning and COVID19 Response](#)*

### C. Use of education resources to support the general response

In environments of low capacity and weak infrastructure, some countries have used education facilities and staff to support the larger community during the crisis. For example, in areas of low or no connectivity in communities, education facilities can be used as information hubs of medical holding centers (once schools are closed). In these cases, attention is needed to define a clear path to returning the schools to their initial purpose once the crisis is over. Additionally, school administrators and teachers comprise a cadre that can be trained during the school closure to help with some initiatives such as sensitization and

#### Tips for providing remote learning

- Assess the capabilities of students, teachers, and infrastructure to adopt high-technology and low-technology solutions.
- Explore various options for distance learning tools including: online virtual lessons, downloadable lessons, MOOCs, mobile-phone and social media blasts, accessible material for students for example using screen readers
- Radio and television programs useful in particular for younger students and their caregivers)
- Prioritize subjects and grades that are associated with exams that are perceived as high stakes by parents (if possible)
- Train teachers how to instruct and engage all students through distance learning tools.
- Appreciate that distance learning is not interactive and work within that framework. Keep time and track of student engagement, possibly through WhatsApp groups.
- Blend appropriate approaches and limit the number of applications and platforms. Not all tools are adaptable to all country contexts.
- Emphasize tools that are compatible with smartphones as they might be more widely available
- Engage in agreements with telecoms to eliminate cost of accessing resources for MoE sites.
- Create support communities among teachers and students to cross-reference questions and solutions.
- Ensure accessibility and availability of education services for students with disabilities.

Adapted from UNESCO's *How to plan distance learning solutions during temporary school closures*

other social activities (e.g., during the Ebola Virus outbreak in 2014, teachers in Guinea carried out advocacy work in their communities and supported contact tracing of Ebola patients.)

## Lessons from previous emergencies to ensure adequate recovery

Supporting the return of the sector to normalcy requires several key actions:

### Assessment of impact to draw future lessons<sup>3</sup>

It is crucial to understand the extent to which the disruptions have impacted, or will impact learning – such as school closures, students and teachers' absenteeism, exams delays, families without sufficient means to send their children back to school etc.).

### Communication campaigns and information sharing

are essential to assure parents of the safety of their children returning to schools. This is critical in communities that have been ravaged by disaster and there is distrust in Government efforts to undertake measures. Communication could include a timeline of school sanitization (if schools have been used as isolation centers), dissemination of screening protocols (what would be the process if a child has a fever at school), provision of hand washing stations accessible for all and supplies, etc.

**Reopening schools more resiliently if the existing education system has been struggling and schools do not have basic infrastructure to meet the needs of students.** Bringing education facilities back to the original condition may not be enough if wash stations or latrines are not available and leaves students vulnerable once again to future health risks. So, recovering from crises present opportunities to rebuild better.

**Reductions in family incomes due to the economic impacts of the crisis might impact attendance,** in particular where school fees are paid by families. If the assessment identifies such instances, countries could consider temporary cancelation of such fees or conditional cash transfers to the most in need.

### Preparing robust data-collections mechanisms.

Systems with established and tested information tools and response plans are faring better. Across many countries in sub-Saharan Africa where data is scarce, World Bank teams are supporting the establishment of robust systems to support urgent decision making.

## EBOLA OUTBREAK 2014-15

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak of 2014, infected 30,000 people, killed more than 13,000, caused economic and social devastation in three of the world's most challenged countries. Many service delivery sectors suffered greatly, and Education was no exception as schools across Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone closed for 8 months and the communities went into practical lockdown attempting to curb the spreading. To address the crisis, each country developed a recovery plan and sought Bank and other partner support to implement it. The World Bank and partners helped Governments minimize the loss of learning using low-tech tools like radio-based education programs and take-home learning packets. Teachers were recruited by Ministries of Health as contact tracers while a few were also retained to develop lesson content. As the infections decreased and the decision was made to reopen schools, Ministries of Education and partners developed protocols and guidelines for disinfecting and reopening of schools, distributed thermometers and sanitization supplies, and established hand-washing stations at every school. To ensure a resilient recovery, teachers were trained in addressing Ebola infections and guided on how to help students catch up on lost time. The academic calendar and examination schedules were modified, and Governments stepped in with school fee subsidies. The full recovery period took 18 months.

<sup>3</sup> Although it is only at this phase that more accurate assessment of impact can be finalized, work and projections should begin while the crisis is ongoing to allow for fast action during the recovery phase. It is understood that these actions may need to be modified depending on scope.

## Tiered Responses

Example 1 - adapted from International School of Dakar Coronavirus Response 2020

Level Levels are determined by the presence of the following indicators	Campus Access Control	Curriculum Program	Community Events	Field Trips - Sports
<b>Level 2</b> Reported cases in Senegal	Members of household restricted from Campus if family member traveled to designated countries	Regular school program Support students who have to stay at home	After-school activities continue as normal Review use of campus by outside groups on a case by case basis	Field trips and sports tournaments scrutinized on a case by case basis
<b>Level 3</b> Many cases in Senegal  Students, families, and staff reported with virus	Previous restrictions and...  Non-community members screened before access, visitors arriving for business purposes are screened at exterior gate  No other visitors to campus	Regular school program for students who attend school  Activate the use of online learning system to provide work for students who elect or are compelled to stay at home  Review of activities program  Activities that engage outside visitors are canceled	Activities with large audiences, 1,000 people, are canceled.  All other rentals and activities may be canceled. Events will be reviewed on a case by case basis	Field trips and sports tournaments are canceled.
<b>Level 4</b> Many incidences of cases with school community  Spread of virus around Senegal  Government closes schools in Senegal	Consider school closure	Full implementation of online program if school is closed	All community events and rentals canceled	Field trips and sports tournaments are canceled.

Example 2 – China’s path to Reopening Schools

### The path to reopening schools, China’s phased approach

The decision of reopening schools is delegated to the province, city, county and district authorities with the principle of minimizing possible re-occurring infection) and prioritizing needs of students (i.e. students in exam preparatory years or graduating). Authorities must also follow the criteria below:

- Provinces must record zero new confirmed COVID-19 cases for 28 consecutive days (in line with WHO requirement - two cycles).
- All schools must be disinfected before the reopening.
- School reopening is gradual: higher grade (older students) return first followed by lower grades with pre-primary returning last. This is also intended to reduce large crowds on campus in the initial return phase.
- Once reopened, if conditions allow, schools must enforce an "all-closure" management approach (no outsiders can enter) to reduce possible infection.
- Schools are required to screen students’ temperature for fever and enforce wearing of masks in the initial stage.