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Supplement to Framework for reopening schools: Emerging lessons from country experiences in managing the process of reopening schools

Education systems around the world continue to grapple with the complex decisions of when and how to reopen schools for in-person learning following widespread closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Many countries closed schools along with other widespread restrictions as an immediate response to the increased spread of COVID-19. But school closures have had increasingly clear negative impacts on child health, education and development, family income and the overall economy.

Experiences in most high-income countries show no measurable impact of school reopening on increasing community transmission rates, while within primary school settings in particular there has been limited transmission among children or between children and adults. However, these experiences have primarily been in high-income countries with relatively low community transmission rates and basic safety measures implemented. Overall, the global evidence suggests that young children have lower susceptibility to infection compared to adults, with susceptibility generally increasing with age, and that children are less likely to be main transmitters of infection. Emerging evidence drawn from Eastern and Southern Africa also suggests that schools have not been associated with significant increases in community transmission. However, where the virus local transmission rate is more prevalent or where safety measures cannot be universally implemented - because of crowded classrooms, lack of WASH facilities, crowded school transportation services, or insufficient and therefore shared teaching and learning materials – decision-making becomes more complex. In addition, different conditions in low and middle-income countries, such as the prevalence of households that include elderly people as well children, need to be considered.

The [Framework for reopening schools](#), was originally published jointly by UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the World Food Programme, and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in June, and it provides practical, high-level guidance on how to reopen. As more countries move in that direction, lessons are beginning to emerge on what is working. These emerging lessons are summarized below, following the four main dimensions of the Framework (safe operations, focus on learning, wellbeing & protection, and reaching the most marginalized) and highlighting country examples.² Sharing these lessons as they develop can help countries strengthen their reopening plans, and ultimately improve the chances of a successful and safer return to in-person learning for all children.



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1 See 'For further information' on updates to changes with school closures and school openings for current status.

2 The country examples cited are based on the operational knowledge of UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, WFP, UNHCR staff and are not meant to be an exhaustive list.

Emerging lessons

Prioritizing early grades and exam-preparatory classes for physical return to school can help mitigate impacts on student educational trajectories and support physical distancing.

- Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Malawi have kept schools closed but returned students who are studying for their examinations, giving them weeks of remedial learning before administering the exams.
- Sweden closed secondary schools but kept pre-primary and primary schools open with safety measures throughout the pandemic.
- The first phase of Denmark's school reopening in April prioritized daycare (infants 0-5 years old) and school for children aged 6-12
- Singapore has prioritized graduating students to return to school to focus on preparing for national exams.

With sufficient capacity and resources, schools can successfully implement context-appropriate health and hygiene protocols. These include symptom screening, handwashing, use of protective equipment, and cleaning procedures for facilities.

- Algeria, Belize, Botswana, Cambodia, Cameroon, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Tanzania, Ukraine are applying combination of context-specific hygiene measures including school cleaning and disinfecting, improving handwashing facilities, provision of cleaning and hygiene supplies to schools, and health checks and related communication messages for children and community members.
- Tajikistan and Singapore requires use of face masks by all students and staff – to support teaching with masks on, microphones have been provided to teachers in Singapore; Belgium, Czech Republic, Scotland require masks for older students; Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands are not requiring masks.
- In Tanzania deep cleaning of schools in refugee camps prior to re-opening.
- In Lao PDR provision of clean water, handwashing facilities and in-school hygiene promotion activities to pre-primary and primary and lower secondary schools
- No countries are known to be currently carrying out widespread school-based testing for COVID-19

Multiple measures – with varying cost implications – can be used to reduce physical contact and limit transmission. These include improving indoor ventilation, moving classes outdoors, building additional classrooms, staggering start/end times, alternating shifts/days, hiring additional teachers to reduce class size, blending distance and in-person learning, and isolating class groupings from one another.

- Bangladesh, Madagascar, and Senegal. Physical cues to encourage distancing, including marks on the ground and seating arrangements in classrooms and on transport
- Singapore, United Kingdom and several provinces in Canada. Using concept of 'classroom bubbles' to limit student interaction across groups and limit closures to individual 'bubble' if infection detected
- China, Italy, Japan, and Scotland: Recruiting additional (temporary) teachers to support smaller class sizes
- Rwanda: Building new classrooms and recruiting more teachers to avoid overcrowding
- Afghanistan, Brazil, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Madagascar, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Senegal and Viet Nam introducing smaller in-person classes, staggered school days, weeks, breaks, and classes in shifts or reorganised groups using blended learning.
- Denmark utilizing outdoor and other innovative spaces for learning such as museums and sports halls to ensure safe distancing beyond physical school spaces.

Proactive planning and clear protocols for re-closings coupled with flexibility in local decision-making can help limit outbreaks as well as disruptions to teaching-learning processes.

- In Somalia the Ministry of Education developed and implemented a tracking system monitor returns to school and identify at-risk students.
- Israel, France, China, South Korea, Australia: localised 'cluster outbreaks' reported and effectively contained through rapid school re-closures.
- Singapore uses the concept of ring-fencing to quickly place students on leave of absence as long as there is a confirmed contact by the student or member in his/her household with an infected individual.
- Poland has given principals the authority to suspend classes (by groups of for the whole school) if outbreaks of COVID occur in schools

Simplifying the curriculum and adapting the academic calendar may help deal with continued uncertainty and enable learning recovery.

- Afghanistan, Brazil, China, Jordan, Ecuador, Egypt, Madagascar, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Senegal, Uruguay and Viet Nam) introduced smaller in-person classes, staggered school days, weeks, breaks, and classes in shifts or reorganised groups using blended learning.
- Liberia, Mozambique, and the Philippines have implemented various condensed curricula in order for learners to catch up.
- Zambia adjusted the academic calendar by shortening vacation periods for examination classes.

Supporting teachers, principals, and school staff to implement remediation and manage students' new psychosocial needs is critical

- Turkey is training teachers in effective blended learning methods providing phone-based psychosocial support
- Guyana is focusing teacher training on strategies to assess and remediate learning losses
- Nicaragua has provided recreation kits for students to develop socio-emotional skills through play.

Less important examinations are being cancelled, and examinations at critical decision points are being modified to reflect school closure periods and to reduce physical contact.

- Ecuador continuing with higher education admission exam, but shortening its length, reducing the pool of students required to take it, and administering it fully on computers.
- Albania cancelled primary and lower secondary exams and adjusted the content of the exam for upper secondary to exclude questions from the period of distance learning
- Egypt replaced examinations in Grades 3 to 9 with research projects while 1.2 million students in Grades 10 and 11 sat tests online

Early and regular communication and support to teachers, parents, and students can help address concerns, surface innovations, and ensure a safe, widely accepted reopening

- Uzbekistan conducted a parents' survey showing that 24% of families are reluctant to send their children back to school. Therefore, reopening will be in a hybrid mode, allowing families who choose to do so to continue with distance learning. All families will have an option to switch between the modes of learning as they feel feasible.
- China used a rapid online survey to listen to children and school communities and tailor a back-to-school communication package to tackle prevention, learning, stigma, and inform the safe return to school campaign.
- Lao PDR Back to School campaign disseminates various communication materials which integrate messages on parenting, mental health and psychosocial support in order to ensure that all children return to school.

(Re-) establishing regular and safe delivery of services such as vaccines and school feeding can help bring children back to school and limit secondary impacts of pandemic.

- Côte d'Ivoire, Nicaragua and Somalia have restored access to school meals to bring children back to school. They have introduced new protocols to ensure safety and hygiene and distributed personal protective equipment to schools, staggered mealtimes and used outdoor spaces to safely distribute meals to children.
- In Côte d'Ivoire, school meals during the reopening have been accompanied by extra cash vouchers for poor households as an incentive for parents to send children back to school. Hand washing facilities have been installed in schools and protective equipment such as masks and hand sanitizer distributed to teachers and cooks.
- During school closures, countries found ways to continue supporting children with food. Guatemala and Peru introduced take home rations during school closures and combined this with delivery of education material.
- UK launched a national voucher scheme to ensure that 1.3 million schoolchildren continued having access to meals during school closures.
- Kerala (India) launched free meals through community kitchens for needy migrant workers and families.
- Uruguay kept schools open during lunchtime to allow caretakers to pick up lunch on a daily basis.

Additional education funding can effectively be targeted to schools and communities hit hardest.

- In Thailand, the Equitable Education Fund has increased its school transfers to target nearly 1 million primary school children from low-income families at risk of disengagement from school and dropping out.

Specific measures can help to support girls' and other vulnerable groups' return to school.

- Burkina Faso is raising awareness about the importance of girls' education in its back-to-school campaigns, as well as offering scholarships, school kits, and meals for the most vulnerable.
- Côte d'Ivoire –implementing a real-time monitoring system, which pays close attention to the challenges that girls face as they return to school and developing guidelines to respond to pregnancies observed among adolescent girls while schools were closed due to COVID-19.
- Ghana - 276 secondary school teachers in two regions trained to support girls whose learning has been disrupted due to school closures

Critical communications and outreach can be diversified by making them available in relevant

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