

SECOND
EDITION

INCLUDING NEW TIPS AND
EMERGING PRACTICES

Supporting teachers in back-to-school efforts

A toolkit for school leaders



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About this Toolkit

This Toolkit was designed for school leaders to support and protect teachers and education support staff in the return to school following COVID-19 related closures. While aimed primarily at school leaders, the Toolkit is also potentially useful for teachers and education support staff to better understand their roles and responsibilities in back-to-school efforts. It is based on the seven dimensions laid out in the joint UNESCO/Teacher Task Force/ILO policy guidance found in the document [Supporting teachers in back-to-school efforts - Guidance for policy-makers](#).

The Toolkit was designed to meet the needs of schools ranging from early childhood to secondary education, yet it can also be applied in other contexts, including technical and vocational education and training institutions, and non-formal education settings.

It contains relevant background information, guiding questions, practical tips and suggestions about practical, operational and pedagogical questions about school reopening, as well as links to protocols and other online resources.

The Toolkit draws on existing guidance related to the COVID-19 crisis, the findings of on-going dialogue between national and regional stakeholders, and perspectives from the greater international education community. Where applicable, it draws on lessons from past and ongoing crises relevant to the current context.

! Important reminders

The importance of local context: In many countries the pandemic situation is evolving daily. Local decision-making about when to reopen schools will be determined by a broad range of considerations; what is right for one school may not be right for another. In some cases, schools may need to close again after re-opening, depending on the evolution of the pandemic and health and safety considerations. Any schools using this Toolkit should always take into account World Health Organization public health guidance, national and local laws, guidance from health and education authorities, the school's mission and culture, and above all the safety and well-being of teachers, learners and the broader community.

Standards and protocols: This Toolkit does not set any new standards, but refers to the [Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19](#) (WHO), and the [IASC Interim Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in Schools](#) (IFRC, UNICEF, WHO). The Toolkit also builds on the [UN Framework for Reopening Schools](#), highlighting concrete considerations at school level to put these global policy recommendations into operation. For additional resources, the websites of the [Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(INEE\)](#) and [Global Education Cluster](#) host a wealth of COVID-19 related teaching and learning tools and resources, including those of the Inter-agency (see the INEE [Covid-19](#) resources and [Minimum Standards](#)). Finally, it draws on the principles set out in international labour standards and the [ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers](#).

Acknowledgements

This toolkit has been developed with the input of many members of the Teacher Task Force network, to which we extend our sincere appreciation: Education International, the International Institute for Educational Planning, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, International Labour Organization, Global Partnership for Education, Norway-Norrad, VVOB – education for development, Volunteer Service Overseas, Save the Children and UNICEF.

We are very grateful to the organisations and individuals who told us their stories as part of the “*What school leaders say*” part of this Toolkit. Special thanks to the organisations that helped us reach out to school leaders, including the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Global School Leaders (Alokit and Dignitas), VVOB – education for development (Rwanda) and Teach For All Network partners (Teach For America, Teach For India, Teach For Nepal and Teach For Pakistan). The Varkey Foundation’s Global Teacher Summit provided us with a unique opportunity to hear from hundreds of teachers from around the globe. Our sincere thanks also to the school leaders who submitted their stories from Bahrain, Egypt, India, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and Uruguay.

Key dimensions for ensuring a safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environment

Recognising the key role of school leaders and teachers

Teachers are the backbone of education systems and the key to reaching learning goals, regardless of context and situation. As part of the COVID-19 related lockdown measures, school leaders and teachers have rapidly mobilised and innovated to make quality distance learning available to their students, with or without the use of digital technologies. In addition, teachers are essential for communicating measures that prevent the spread of the virus, ensuring that children are safe and supported. As schools reopen, their role will be equally crucial.

See the [Call for Action on Teachers](#)

Education systems around the world face a combination of common and unique challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With some countries beginning to record a slowdown in the number of active cases, questions about when to reopen schools, how to reopen them safely and under which conditions, are at the forefront of decision-making, from the national level to the school level.

There is no perfect or absolute set of answers and the ideal return to school may not exist. Rather, each school will need to establish its own optimal and minimum conditions for reopening. Each school will consider how it can best apply [internationally and nationally recognized water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\) protocols](#) and how it can support teachers and learners in light of local contexts, capabilities and constraints.

In all contexts, school leaders will need to **set priorities** and recognize that **trade-offs** may be needed. For example, to reduce the number of teachers and students on site to facilitate physical distancing, schools may have to selectively reopen and stagger the return by grade and/or level. They may also have to privilege certain population segments or learner groups, such as vulnerable and at-risk learners and the children of essential workers. In some cases, closing schools again may have to be considered. Alternatively, available resources may be reallocated to ensure the readiness of school buildings and safety equipment, or to better prepare teachers and education support staff.

Through a set of guiding questions, tips and resources, this Toolkit aims to help school leaders identify actions to be taken in each of seven key dimensions (Figure 1), to better support and protect teachers and other education personnel in back-to-school efforts. The questions aim to spark reflection to assist the planning process, based on local contexts and school capacity.

Figure 1. Framework for the Return to School: Seven key dimensions



Social dialogue and communication

All decisions related to reopening should be informed by **social dialogue** and use **effective communication** strategies. Teachers, school staff and their representative organizations should be actively involved in setting out policies and plans for school reopening, including occupational safety and health measures to protect personnel.

Communication with teachers, learners and education support staff about reopening can ensure **clarity about expectations** and **highlight their role in the success** of safe, inclusive return-to-school efforts, including overall well-being, and the teaching and learning recovery process. It will be important to **communicate early, clearly and regularly with parents** and school communities to understand their concerns and build support for plans to reopen. Parents will want to know what safeguards have been put in place to minimize health risks. They will also want to know about the school's ongoing commitment to key educational principles and goals. As teachers are often the first point of contact with parents, they will need to be prepared to ensure everyone is informed continually. They also need to be able to communicate accurate information, thus dispelling myths about COVID-19.

In response to concerns about **equity**, an outreach component may be employed to encourage the return to school of more vulnerable learners including girls and learners with disabilities. Messaging should recognize the specific challenges of learners with family experience of COVID-19 who might face stigma and discrimination upon their return. Where selective or staggered returns are occurring, outreach can explain the rationale for the decision and a proposed timetable of the return for those who continue learning at home. This will often involve the designation of key focal points among staff and/or a school management committee (SMC) or parent-teachers association (PTA).

In low-resource settings, targeted communications with teachers, parents and the local community will be important in **mobilizing additional resources** that could be key to reopening schools in a realistic and measured way. This includes human resources, as well as financial and in-kind contributions such as information and communication technologies (ICTs), print materials or personal protective equipment (PPE).

A systemic approach to communications can be adopted that includes local government/education authorities, teacher organizations, other schools and the health sector.



Safety and health

As schools reopen, the **health and safety of learners and school staff is most critical**. School leaders have a key role in maintaining a safe environment for teachers to work and students to learn. Occupational health and safety measures issued by competent central health and education authorities aligned to those released by international organizations (in particular the [World Health Organization](#) and the International Labour Organization) provide a framework that school leaders can implement and monitor while adapting to the local situation and norms.

Concern for the **well-being of teachers, support staff and students** is at the heart of decision-making, balancing the desire to return to school while considering the risks to (and needs of) teachers, support staff and learners to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable members of the school community are met. Policies and practices on safety and health should be developed with staff and their representative organizations. Both female and male teachers and their representatives should be actively engaged in this decision-making process.



Teachers' psychological and socio-emotional well-being

school leaders and teachers need to be prepared for the various ways that the COVID-19 pandemic may affect both teachers and learners. **Many teachers and learners could experience psychological and socio-emotional distress** as a result of prolonged isolation.

Teachers may have sick family members or older vulnerable parents to look after, while others of advanced age may feel especially susceptible to the illness. For teachers, distress can also stem from the increased workload of teaching in new and challenging ways without adequate training and support – particularly if they must concurrently provide extra care to their own children.

Psychological and socio-emotional distress can lead to teacher burnout, expressed through high rates of absenteeism or even attrition, undermining efforts to build school resilience.

School-level responses may include ongoing psychological and socio-emotional assessment and support for teachers and learners. Teachers should be free to address their own needs, exercise self-care and manage their own stress. School leaders can help develop teachers' stress management skills and coping mechanisms. This is critical to ensure that teachers can teach effectively and provide much-needed psychosocial support to learners.



Teacher preparation and learning

The return to school represents a second significant shift in teaching and learning. To manage the process, it is important for teachers and education support staff to receive **adequate professional preparation and information** to assume their responsibilities and meet expectations within the return-to-school effort.

Training, peer-to-peer learning and collaboration with other teachers, both within the school and more broadly, will be critical. Such support is particularly important where additional strain may be placed on teachers' time if they are required to conduct both face-to-face and distance education where staggered approaches in the return to school exist or if parents opt to keep students at home to continue learning remotely.

School leaders need to ensure **teachers are empowered to make decisions about teaching and learning**. They can work with teachers to adjust curricula (condense/prioritize) and assessment methodologies based on revised school calendars and instructions from central authorities. School leaders should also support teachers to reorganize classrooms to allow delivery of individual instruction corresponding to accelerated learning and remedial responses, while adhering to regulations on physical distancing.

Teachers' key role in recognizing learning gaps and formulating pedagogical responses remains critical. Since ensuring **quality instruction** may have been a challenge during closures, teachers will need to assess learning that took place at home on or offline and make adjustments to ensure those who have fallen behind are helped. Flexible teaching and learning approaches, accelerated learning and remedial education strategies will be needed to ensure the needs of all learners are met. This is especially true for vulnerable groups, including low-income families, girls, those with special needs, ethnic or cultural minorities and those living in remote rural areas with no access to distance education.

School leaders and teachers also need training for emergency responses, innovation and alternative teaching methods. School leaders can establish peer support networks and communities of practice to promote collaboration and share good practices.



Teacher deployment, rights and working conditions

Deploying teachers and support staff effectively and protecting their rights and working conditions represent fundamental pillars of the return-to-school effort. Considerations should include: planned deployment strategies based on an assessment of human resources gaps resulting from staggered or part-time schedules; teachers' own family obligations and personal risk factors; ability to travel to school safely; and capacity to ensure a minimum number of hours of daily instruction time. At the same time, compliance should be ensured with relevant international standards and national laws on workers' rights and the need for safety, health and socio-emotional well-being.

These issues also apply to the operational staff employed by schools – such as caretakers, cleaners, food service staff and bus drivers.



Financial resources and investments

Decisions to reopen depend on the context and capacity of schools to plan, obtain or mobilize the **budgets and resources** needed to activate hygiene and sanitation protocols, ensure physical distancing, and build the capacity of teachers and education support staff to deliver education outcomes.

Creating **COVID-19 related school budgets** should be a joint process between schools, which understand the needs on the ground, and the competent education authorities, which may be able to provide access to additional financing. In cases where schools have limited resources, creative problem solving, hard decisions and trade-offs may be necessary. There may be ways to mobilize local financial, human resource support or in-kind contributions through school management committees, parent-teacher associations and other community networks.

In these scenarios, the budgeting process can offer an opportunity for school leaders to rethink traditional ways of doing things – looking at ways of mutualizing resources with community leaders and associations and seeking out the knowledge, assets and expertise of experienced NGOs and CSOs. Local businesses may also be willing to support the return-to-school effort through donations, loans or low-cost purchase of innovations that support teaching and learning.



Monitoring and evaluation

The reopening of schools will require effective monitoring, evaluation and adaptations to implementation as deemed necessary. Based on tools from ministries of education and decentralized authorities, school leaders should adapt and use simple frameworks to measure progress. They should take into account teachers' roles in providing quality teaching and fostering a safe learning environment.



I. SOCIAL DIALOGUE & COMMUNICATION

Wider social dialogue with the school and local community involving teachers is essential for planning the reopening of schools. It aims to ensure communities, school managers and teachers are engaged in decision-making about how schools should reopen within established national guidelines, including considerations of timing, new compulsory measures such as sanitation protocols, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and both pedagogical and logistical considerations.

Ministries of education and national/district authorities will issue general guidelines on how and when schools reopen. Decisions about reopening need to be communicated with teachers, learners and education support staff to ensure clarity of expectations, and highlight their role in the success of safe, inclusive return-to-school efforts.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Open consultations on the safe reopening of schools

Have you considered:

- reviewing guidance received from your ministry and the World Health Organization and consulting with competent health and education authorities regarding school reopening?
- consulting with teachers and their representative organizations and other education personnel at your school about the general plan for your school's reopening?
- developing specific safety and health protocols for staff, learners and the broader school community, based on the guidance received, to guide behaviour on physical distancing and risk prevention? **(See also Section II)**
- discussing safety and health protocols with teachers and education support staff (nurses, caretakers, guards, food-service staff and bus drivers)?
- discussing guidelines to support each other's well-being with teachers and education support staff (nurses, caretakers, guards, food-service staff and bus drivers)? **(See also Section III)**
- designating a focal point or a task team for COVID-19 risk prevention, which regularly consults with staff and their representatives?

Open consultations on how to resume classroom learning

Have you considered:

- including consultations with staff and their representative organizations in your planning process to ensure they understand their key role in facilitating quality and inclusive learning? **(See also Section IV and V)**
- consulting with school counsellors/psychologists and nurses available in your school on how they will support teachers and learners? **(See also Section III)**
- consulting with parents, caregivers, parent-teacher associations, school-management committees and student bodies on the return-to-school effort, including different scenarios for schools gradually reopening, the steps taken and their justification?
- consulting with teachers on which students/learners should be prioritized and on how to reach children who are at risk of not returning to school or of dropping out after return? **(See also Section IV)**

Communicating with teachers and education support staff

Have you considered:

- planning for regular communications with your staff to ensure concerns are addressed, roles and responsibilities are clarified, and expectations managed?
- establishing clear communication mechanisms (including designated focal points) for staff and students?
- planning communications with teachers and education support staff to clarify:
 - updated information about health and safety protocols?
 - reorganization of classrooms and school facilities to enable smaller group differentiated instruction and adhere to regulations on physical distancing and hygiene? **(see also Section II)**
 - the importance of socio-emotional support and teachers' well-being, including recognizing and accommodating teachers' family and caregiving responsibilities? **(see also Section III)**
 - changes in codes of conduct or other safeguarding policies, including risk management plans and emergency protocols?
 - the need to be aware of learners who may have suffered from trauma or violence during school closures? **(see also Section III)**
 - plans for the modified school calendar, including, for example, the use of multiple shifts on a daily or weekly basis? **(see also Section IV)**
 - plans for professional learning and collaboration with peers?
 - plans for assessing learning losses due to school closures?

- encouraging teachers to be in touch with learners who remain at home, and their parents and caregivers, via regular virtual meetings, emails, phone calls, Google hangouts, and/or other channels?

- providing teachers and other staff with guidance on how to engage in dialogue with parents and caregivers about their children's return to school (including parents and caregivers who are reticent about sending their children to school)?

- exploring possibilities for providing training and guidance for teachers on how to identify at-risk learners (especially those at risk of not returning or dropping out soon after return) and to communicate with their families? **(see also Section IV)**

Communicating with parents and caregivers

Have you considered:

- sharing key information with parents, caregivers and families (for example, through posters, emails, flyers, SMS, WhatsApp messages) on:

- preparatory arrangements that have been made by the school to apply hygiene and sanitation protocols?

- rules and guidelines that learners and their families are expected to follow to ensure a safe return to school for all?

- changes to the overall calendar, as well as to daily and weekly timetables?

- planning for exams or assessments, including cancellations and postponements?

- updates to school hours, including break times, and drop-off and pick-up arrangements?

- availability of key school services, including canteen services and school feeding programmes, counselling and other types of psychological and socio-emotional support, health services, and/or emergency services?

- availability of accelerated education programmes, remedial classes, tutoring, or any other plans to provide additional learning support where needed?

- developing dedicated communications for the families of children who are vulnerable?

- identifying parents who are unwilling to send their children back to school, and reached out to them?

- contacting families of vulnerable learners (such as those who are at risk of dropping out, learners from minority groups)? This may include home visits by yourself or by teachers.

- inviting parents to SMC or PTA meetings or naming a focal point with whom parents and caregivers can raise and discuss concerns with school leadership?

Communicating with local community members

Have you considered:

- appealing to local authorities, community leaders, associations, civil-society organizations (CSOs) and the business community to support return-to-school efforts, including social safety nets for your most vulnerable staff members and learners, educational resources (e.g. print, digital devices, internet data), cash transfers, food distribution, or childcare, as needed?
- reaching out to local authorities, community members, and leaders from other schools (as relevant) to coordinate inclusive “safe back to school” campaigns aiming to reach all households and children, in particular for those in remote locations?



Tips

Social dialogue can be time consuming but is essential to ensure effective uptake and implementation of policy and plans by members of the school community. Good social dialogue can draw in the expertise of those affected by policy, and ensure buy-in of all stakeholders. If this dialogue is superficial, or does not have equitable representation, you risk undermining the policy and planning process, and excluding the most vulnerable. Read more about facilitating inclusive social dialogue and engaging with teachers in the [Teacher Policy Development Guide](#), Section 4.4.3 on Engaging Teachers, pages 97-98.

Create a planning team. Consider setting up a team responsible for planning and organising the return to work for staff at your school. Try to ensure that there is equal representation between management and a broad representation of different staff categories as relevant, including teachers, teacher assistants, counsellors, bus drivers and janitors. This team should be formed based on inclusive principles, ensuring that female staff, and staff from traditionally marginalized groups and/or minority groups are represented. Read more about setting up such a team in Step 1 of the [ILO’s 10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19](#).

Build on existing structures. Reflect on, mobilize and build on the existing structures in your school, including children’s clubs, parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and school management committees (SMCs), youth-led groups and family networks, to support a safe, inclusive school reopening process. Where PTAs and SMCs exist and/or where a similar group is convened, it is critical that there is both representation and voices from female and male community members, as well as traditionally marginalized groups and/or minority groups. Ensure female community members from all groups are not only engaged but are supported to share their perspectives. Read more about how to engage with current mechanisms and groups in your school community in the [Global Education Cluster’s Safe Back to School: A Practitioner’s Guide, page 4](#).

Create a communication strategy. A clear communication strategy can help to ensure that schools are better able to communicate widely and transparently with staff, learners, families, and communities about decisions taken to support a safe, healthy return to school. Such a strategy should include the roles of different staff members, including of any designated focal points, as well as the types of communication channels to be used to convey different messaging (e.g. email, ministry and school websites/ portals, leaflets or flyers and social mobilization through community meetings, WhatsApp groups, local community radio). The strategy should be underpinned by a commitment to accuracy, transparency and accountability, and provide guidance on how to convey key messages clearly, concisely and factually.

Beware of assumptions! Keep in mind that not everyone has had the same information about the COVID-19 crisis and response during the lockdown period. Your staff, students and their families may therefore be returning to school with different understandings and assumptions about the disease, including some that may be based on misinformation. Be prepared to state the facts and provide clear information to dispel myths surrounding COVID-19 and reduce potential discrimination and stigmatization.

What school leaders say

Communicate with teachers first

Where possible, communicate key decisions and discuss plans with teachers and education support staff before reaching out to the wider school community of caregivers and students. This helps ensure that teachers have the opportunity to discuss and clarify before they themselves need to transmit key information to caregivers and students. In some cases, face-to-face meetings and focus groups have been used to reach consensus with teachers and allay fears about returning to work.

Source: [The Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Research Evidence from Interviews with Primary and Secondary Teachers in England](#), 2020

Creating visual aids

In the United States, one school principal is using mobile phones and simple messaging services to prepare teachers to adopt the different protocols when school reopens. Simple, short videos are made, using smart phones and volunteers, to illustrate new circulation rules for school corridors, as well as safety and sanitation protocols. Films are kept short and simple and sent to teachers via WhatsApp and FaceBook Messenger. The same will be sent to parents' groups to explain new rules for dropping off and picking up students. In the United Arab Emirates and the Philippines, online videos and workshops are being used to show students how to use face masks and hand sanitizer, and posted in YouTube channels.

Using surveys to gauge community needs

In a secondary school in Montevideo, Uruguay, the school leader recognised the importance of involving the whole school community in planning for school reopening. To help identify and address their concerns, electronic surveys were sent to:

- teachers, to understand their medical conditions and their capacity to return to school;
- parents, to ascertain if they were willing to send their children back to school; and
- students, to learn their feelings; most highlighted their wish to return to school to see their peers again.

Tools for communications, management and staff planning

The Global School Leaders group has put together a set of practical resources for school leaders about reopening schools, including preparing schools and staff, managing wellbeing and supporting the community, [tools for communication](#) and learning and management tools including phone and user manuals for [WhatsApp](#) and Facebook Messenger. Resources also include a model [teacher survey](#) to measure staff mental and physical wellbeing, and preparedness to return to school.

Source: [Global School Leaders – Resources for schools reopening](#)

“School leaders are ‘being ‘caught in the middle’, between pupil needs, staff and union worries, parent concerns, and ever changing government policy. ”

Head teacher, United Kingdom



Resources & further reading

- [EI Guidance on Reopening Schools and Education Institutions](#), Education International, 2020
- [COVID-19 and the education sector](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [ILO standards and COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) FAQ: Key provisions of international labour standards relevant to the evolving COVID-19 outbreak](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [Introduction to social dialogue and tripartism \(International Training Centre-ILO free on-line course\)](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [The need for social dialogue in addressing the COVID-19 crisis](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [Using the INEE Minimum Standards during COVID-19 \(video\)](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Social Mobilisation and Children's Engagement strategies for teachers on Ebola: A Facilitators Guide for Master Trainers](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2015
- [How can teachers and school systems respond to the COVID-19 pandemic? Some lessons from TALIS](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020
- [Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide](#), Global Education Cluster, 2020



II. SCHOOL SAFETY AND HEALTH

As schools begin to reopen, the **primary concern remains the health and safety of learners, teachers and other school staff**. School leaders have a key role in maintaining a safe environment for teachers to work and students to learn. School leaders need to ensure staff cooperate with the measures to guard their own safety and that of students and other colleagues. School leaders can also perform an assessment of physical spaces to calculate upper limits of students per classroom where possible to ensure physical distancing norms are respected. School leaders can consider using all spaces including common areas such as libraries, corridors, and the outdoors, where and when appropriate.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Planning for a safe, physical learning environment

Have you considered:

- obtaining and reviewing guidelines from health and education authorities about ensuring your school is safe for reopening?
- organizing visits from public health experts and/or government authorities, where possible, to ensure your school is safe for re-opening?
- undertaking a risks assessment in consultation with staff, and developing a policy and plan to control risk at the school, taking into account the needs of different jobs at the school?
- mobilizing support from local health clinics or district health authorities, where possible, to provide assistance with back-to-school efforts?
- organizing inspections of the premises following the school closure period, including classrooms; water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities; and outdoor spaces?
- exploring possibilities for upgrading and improving school WASH facilities, if necessary, for example by constructing sex-segregated toilets and providing running water?
- exploring how to obtain sufficient and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), particularly masks, as well as soap, sanitizers, disinfectants, and disposable hand towels?

- coordinating with staff to develop a regular inspection, cleaning and disinfection plan for facilities and equipment, including disposal of potentially infectious waste and safe use of sanitizing products?

- drafting a plan with your staff for how to utilize all classrooms and other indoor and outdoor spaces (if appropriate) to ensure safe physical distancing between learners and teachers?

- preparing a plan to re-organize class time, if availability of space is an issue, so that there are smaller groups to allow for safe physical distancing? **(see also Section IV)**

- exploring strategies to limit contact between members of the school community, for example by using floor markings to direct foot-traffic flows, different entrances and exits, and staggered arrival and departure times, according to age cohorts?

Planning for behavioral policies to observe health and sanitation protocols and the use of PPE

Have you considered:

- with your teachers and other staff (including temporary staff and contractors) participating in training on the national sanitation and hygiene measures for risk prevention?

- promoting handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing?

- ensuring that your staff members have reviewed and understood your school's protocols and instructions related to their own safety and that of other colleagues and students?

- ensuring that all teachers and education support staff have access to suitable PPE, particularly masks, where adequate physical distancing cannot be ensured, including through facilitating and supporting mask-making where disposable masks are unavailable?

- discussing with your teachers and other staff how masks and other PPE are used to prevent the spread of COVID-19; and participating in training on when and how to use masks and other PPE, and how to maintain and dispose of them safely?

- undertaking a risk assessment for your staff to identify vulnerable staff members who may be more susceptible to infection (e.g. older teachers, teachers with prior health conditions, teachers with family members who have tested positive for COVID-19)?

- exploring extra measures that could be taken to ensure the safety of vulnerable staff members, including allowing them to work from home or take leave as appropriate?

- discussing with your teachers and other staff how to deal with and report situations that could present a risk to you, your colleagues and your students?

- working with relevant staff on plans for managing COVID-19, if school health services are available, including screening students and staff and isolating them should they present symptoms?

- reaching out to local authorities and the community for support, if no formal school health services are available, to manage potential COVID-19 cases in your school?

- sharing printed, online or verbal information about your school's hygiene and sanitation protocols and guidelines with teachers, other education personnel, and learners and their families?

- exploring possibilities for providing time during staff meetings and lessons for students and staff to discuss the school's ongoing COVID-19 response, any important updates on the disease, and good practices to follow when it comes to physical and mental health and well-being?



Tips

Help young children adapt. Use songs and play to help younger children adapt to regular handwashing and wearing masks. These songs are available online to help children understand the importance of handwashing and how long they have to wash their hands for (see these videos from Ubongo Kids in Tanzania <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGzvqkQbuWk> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlacO1h-KIQ>). For younger children, put masks on stuffed toys in the classroom. Older children can decorate masks or play games such as guessing facial expressions under masks.

Use WASH Kits. Save the Children has developed a series of three kits and a guidance note covering specific lists of items that should be included in COVID-19 WASH school kits as schools plan for safe reopening. For more information, see: [WASH School Kit 1](#); [WASH School Kit 2](#); [WASH School Kit 3](#); [School and Household Hygiene COVID-19 guidance](#).

What school leaders say

Limiting student movement within the school

To limit students' interaction outside the classroom, one school leader in Palestine has organised the following:

- Have teachers move between classrooms, rather than having students fill the hallways in between classes. Students stay inside the classes until the teacher for the following class arrives.
- Allow students to eat lunches at their desks or in small groups outdoors instead of in crowded playgrounds. This has meant also introducing three small breaks during the school day, of 30 minutes for each group.
- Leaving classroom doors open to help reduce the number of people touching physical surfaces (such as doorknobs), which would require frequent sterilizing.

Meeting water, sanitation and hygiene needs

Many schools have been struggling with a lack of hand-washing facilities, which are often required as part of new safe reopening protocols. Where it is not possible to install sinks and basins, schools in Rwanda and the Philippines have reported using locally made portable taps and basins in front of each classroom to encourage children to wash their hands regularly.

Exploring learning spaces within and outside the school

Faced with the challenges of social distancing, many schools are turning to different spaces to hold classes, including refectories and corridor spaces. Transport is also an issue for some teachers and students. One primary school in Nepal is encouraging face-to-face teaching in small groups for pre-primary and primary children and their teachers who live in the same neighbourhood.

Building common responses

Where possible, school leaders can reach out to other local schools to harmonise approaches and build a community response. In this way, all local schools can follow a similar path, rather than cause each other problems by taking very different approaches. Such coordination is also important to prevent the flow of misinformation, for example, if one school welcomes back all grades, but another advises parents and caregivers that it is not yet safe to return.



Resources & further reading

- [A 10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook](#), International Labour Organization, 2016
- [Reopening schools in the context of COVID-19: Health and safety guidelines from other countries](#), Learning Policy Institute, 2020
- [Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide](#), Global Education Cluster, 2020
- [Back to school: preparing and planning for the reopening of schools, UNESCO, 2020](#)
- [IASC Guidance on COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools](#), UNICEF, WHO & IFRC, 2020
- [WASH and Covid 19](#), World Health Organization, 2020
- [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Standards for Schools in Low-cost Settings](#), World Health Organisation, 2009



III. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Return-to-school responses should anticipate the **psychological and socio-emotional impacts of the pandemic on teachers and learners**. Some teachers may feel vulnerable to the illness, have sick family members, or have their own young children or vulnerable parents to look after. Students may need additional psychological and socio-emotional support. A whole new set of vulnerabilities could have reared up during school closures, including disruption of vital safety nets such as school meals or exposure to other trauma in “at-risk” households.

School leaders can monitor teachers, and suggest if they should be assessed with regard to their overall well-being, and refer them to mental health services if needed. In school, teachers should also be empowered in self-care and given skills to manage work and COVID-19-related stress so they can respond effectively to the needs of students and other staff. School leaders should consider the additional risk to girls, as well as wider child protection concerns.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Staff psychological and socio-emotional well-being

Have you considered:

- reflecting on how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting your role as a school leader, your own psychological and socio-emotional wellbeing, and the wellbeing of your staff?
- discussing the importance of self-care, stress management, and overall psychological and socio-emotional well-being with your teachers and education support staff?
- developing a plan to support staff well-being when schools reopen, including how to mobilize and maintain a peer support network?
- organizing for yourself and your colleagues, training on recognizing and referring those showing signs of distress to mental health specialists?
- exploring measures that could be taken to provide additional psychological and socio-emotional support for vulnerable and at-risk staff members, including those who have increased workloads due to the crisis?

- discussing with your staff how their roles have been affected by the crisis and how to manage and meet expectations once your school reopens? **(see also Section IV)**

- exploring possibilities for more effective staff time management and reducing workload pressure, for example by streamlining or decreasing paperwork and other administrative responsibilities?

- prioritizing psychological and socio-emotional support for vulnerable and at-risk teachers, including those:

- of advanced age,

- with pre-existing medical conditions, or

- disadvantaged by fewer resources and increased workloads due to taking extra shifts or engaging in blended learning?

Preparing staff to provide psychosocial support to learners

Have you considered:

- discussing and developing with your staff a clear strategy on how to engage in reassuring dialogue about school reopening with learners, parents and caregivers?

- exploring possibilities for providing inclusive and gender-responsive staff training and related resources, including checklists, on how to identify and work with learners experiencing distress, anxiety and other vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 (e.g. girls who may have suffered from sexual abuse, and/or early and unintended pregnancy during school closures)?

- providing checklists for teachers to assess learners' behaviour and reactions in relation to stress and anxiety, and training teachers to provide needed support?

- if teachers can't provide support, are there any other personnel in the school who can?

- whether teachers know how to report suspicions of abuse, violence or neglect of children?

- whether you and your staff have been responsive to the needs of some families for a more flexible return to school?

- exploring possibilities to train teachers in classroom management and conflict resolution skills, including understanding the importance of positive reinforcement to deal more effectively with difficult classroom situations as a result of students suffering from COVID-19-related distress?

- reviewing and revising with your staff, if necessary, relevant child protection policies and mechanisms at your school and in your community, and ensuring staff members are aware of how to report suspicions of abuse, violence, or neglect of children in a professional and confidential manner?

- reviewing and revising with your staff, if necessary, codes of conduct and discipline policies and mechanisms at your school, and ensuring all staff members are aware that there is zero tolerance for corporal punishment and other forms of cruel or degrading punishment?

- exploring the possibilities for your school and/or the wider community to continue to provide or begin providing essential social services to vulnerable learners, including mental health support, social protection and nutrition?

Combat discrimination and stigmatization

Have you considered:

- discussing and developing with your staff school guidelines to identify and prevent bullying, discrimination and stigmatization of learners and teachers related to COVID-19?
- working with your staff, local authorities, community members and other school leaders to support awareness-raising about COVID-19-related discrimination and eliminate exclusion at classroom, school and community levels for teachers and learners?
- working with your staff, local authorities, community members, and other school leaders to promote campaigns to reduce stigma and allay fears about contagion or contamination.

“ Before schools reopened, the teachers were worried about resuming work and contracting the virus, as were the parents. We had no WASH facilities, no masks and large classes. Discussions with health staff would have helped us a lot. It would also have been reassuring to have psychologists in schools for psychosocial care.

In the end, we were able to obtain sufficient sanitation and masks from an international NGO, and only one grade returned to school to prepare for exams. The classes were split in two. ”

Primary school principal, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso



Tips

Recognize signs of stress. It is important to know how to recognize signs of stress in yourself or in your colleagues. *Teachers in Crisis Contexts Training for Primary School Teachers* offers a list of signs of stress. If you or your staff answers yes to feeling these on a regular basis (once a week or more) then they may be suffering from stress:

1. I feel tense and nervous
2. I have physical aches and pain
3. I am always tired, physically and mentally
4. I cannot tolerate noises
5. My work no longer interests me
6. I act impulsively
7. I can't get distressing events out of my mind
8. I am sad and feel like crying
9. I am less efficient than I used to be
10. I have trouble planning and thinking clearly
11. I have difficulty sleeping
12. Doing even routine things is an effort
13. I am cynical or very critical
14. I have bad dreams or nightmares
15. I am irritable, minor inconveniences or demands annoy me a lot
16. I am spending more time at work than initially

Download the full guide here:

<https://inee.org/resources/teachers-crisis-contexts-training-primary-school-teachers>

Respond to stress. Save the Children has developed a Teacher Professional Development module for teacher well-being that focuses on understanding, identifying and responding to stress as an influencer of teacher and student well-being. The module aims to train teachers to react positively to stress by developing personal strategies and through support of others. For more information, see: [Safe Schools: Teacher Professional Development](#)

Build peer support networks. Peer support networks are important for school leaders' and teachers' well-being. Teachers and other staff can provide mentorship and support to colleagues. Students can provide peer support and look to the community for support as necessary – informal counselling from a PTA member, for example. You can also encourage teachers to share what helps them, which can depend on individuals, cultures and contexts.

Fight discrimination. It is important that teachers and education support staff be briefed on recognizing and addressing discrimination resulting from COVID-19 to help them prevent exclusion and bullying. This can be of school staff and learners who are perceived as being infected, or of wider groups such as people from cultural or ethnic groups that are perceived as more likely to be infected.

What school leaders say

A whole-child approach

In Egypt, one school leader highlights the need to be aware of the multiple levels of needs that students and teachers face upon returning to school. Some students will have faced food insecurity, poverty, emotional strain and violence during school closures. School leaders need to recognize that these students and their families have particular educational, emotional and social needs. Where possible, school leaders could involve community and welfare services in meeting these needs according to school regulations and laws.

Well-being of school leaders and teachers

One head teacher from the United Kingdom stressed that one of the most important aspects of good school leadership is the need for school leaders to ensure that they are receiving enough help and support themselves. This could involve reaching out to other school leaders in the same community to share experiences, reduce stress and give and receive support. In Indonesia and the United States, teachers have been organised into small peer support groups not only for training but also for psycho-social support.

Support through counselling services

Many school leaders have identified the need for counselling services to be provided to both students and staff. In one school in Pakistan, teachers are invited to volunteer for extra training to be able to support other teachers and students. Physical education and arts teachers, for whom teaching online has been difficult or impossible, have received training in mental health and counselling, and have been able to support other teachers and students. Other activities offered to the school community include mindfulness and yoga.

“ Many teachers are dealing with anxiety over the return to school and their role in it. My biggest challenge has been to help teachers overcome these feelings. ”

High school leader, Oman



Resources & further reading

- [Gender and Education during COVID-19](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Tips for parents and caregivers during COVID-19 School Closures: Supporting children's wellbeing and learning](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Guidance for parents and caregivers – compilation of resources](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Addressing the gender dimensions of school closures](#), UNESCO, 2020
- [How teachers can talk to children about coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#), UNICEF, 2020
- [Psychosocial Support Activities in Child Friendly Spaces, Schools and Communities](#), UNICEF, 2019
- [Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak](#), World Health Organization, 2020
- [Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide](#), Save the Children, 2020



IV. TEACHER PREPARATION AND LEARNING

Following school closures, the return to school represents a second significant shift in how teaching and learning occurs. In order for teachers to ensure an inclusive and safe learning environment that continues to support key education goals, teacher capacities in several areas require reinforcement through training and other forms of support.

School leaders should work with teachers in adjusting curricula and assessment methodologies based on instructions from central authorities. Meanwhile **teachers' key role in recognizing learning gaps** and choosing instructional strategies, including support for disadvantaged learners, remains key.

School leaders should support teachers with guidelines on how to balance teaching responsibilities between students in classrooms and those learning remotely. School leaders and teachers also need support in emergency responses, innovation and alternative teaching methods.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Teacher preparation and readiness

Have you considered:

- possibilities for providing professional support for your staff, including training, coaching/mentoring and checklists/learning aids, in the following key areas:
 - your school's plan for maintaining a safe learning environment, including physical distancing requirements, adjustments to school hours and the school calendar, hygiene and sanitation protocols? **(see also Section II)**
 - understanding the impact of COVID-19 on staff roles and managing and meeting expectations when schools reopen? **(see also Section III)**
 - reorganizing classrooms to allow delivery of individual instruction corresponding to accelerated learning and remedial responses?
- effective classroom management skills to cope with new classroom organization and teaching routines to ensure teachers' key role in providing quality teaching and achieving key learning outcomes?

- effective decision-making in adjusting curricula (condense/prioritize) and assessment methodologies based on revised school calendars and instructions from central authorities?
- accelerated learning and remedial education for those showing learning gaps, especially disadvantaged learners or those who suffered more significant learning disruption?
- undertaking rapid, continuous assessments of learners' progress and well-being, as well as tackling persisting gaps and threats to equity and inclusion?
- how to identify and manage their own stress or that of their colleagues?
(see also Section III)
- how to identify trauma and support vulnerable or "at-risk" learners in the classroom? **(see also Section III)**
- facilitating collaboration and peer support between teachers within your school, and, where feasible, between schools, based on previous lessons learnt during closures to exchange information, share tips on returning to school or facilitate sharing of materials?

The organization of learning

Have you considered:

- consulting with local authorities and staff about the optimal organization of learning in your school to ensure the safety of the school community, for example by using a shift system and staggered reopening (by prioritizing certain learners).
- reopening the school for the whole school population, or for a smaller group of learners?
- If it is for a smaller group, will classroom instruction be prioritized for:
 - children of essential workers and/or key sectors of the local economy?
 - selected education levels or grades such as primary and early childhood education
 - learners with special education needs or vulnerable groups at risk of dropping out (in particular disabled children, vulnerable girls or minority populations)?
 - those preparing for high-stakes examinations?
 - learners lacking household ICT and connectivity?
 - or a combination of the above factors?
- if learners' family situations allow for certain learners to continue learning effectively at a remote location?
- adjusting the school and exam calendar to compensate for lost teaching and learning time (if yes, have you communicated this to the school community)?
- following an accelerated syllabus for core subjects during the remaining months of the academic year(s)?

- if some students continue learning from home, organising for teachers to receive the necessary ICT equipment, connectivity, training and support to carry out blended teaching? This can include hardware related to radio and TV, computers, printers, mobile devices and Internet data

- if teachers are required to work from home, organising for them to have access to reliable internet and telephone connections, and digital communication channels (e.g. email; SMS; voice messaging; messaging applications such as Messenger, Telegram, Viber and WhatsApp; social media, such as Instagram and Twitter)?

- developing a plan, with your staff, to prepare for quality teaching and learning to continue if schools close again?

Curriculum and assessment

Have you considered:

- reviewing guidance from relevant authorities (if any) about their assumptions about learning during school closures and what it means for your students?

- changes to the curriculum and syllabus in response to the COVID-19 crisis made by local or central authorities and/or the ministry of education, and have you facilitated opportunities for teachers to discuss, review and enact these changes?

- exploring possibilities for organizing assessments to identify key gaps in learning and areas of the syllabus that need to be reinforced or revised?

- exploring how to ensure that meaningful formative and summative assessments continue, particularly if end-of-term examinations are postponed or cancelled?

Addressing equity issues in the classroom

Have you considered:

- is it possible to work with teachers to put in place flexible learning approaches and “workarounds”?

- is it possible to put in place catch-up classes or remedial learning, in particular for those who have not been able to follow learning from a distance?

- is it possible to organize students with specific learning needs into smaller groups to provide more differentiated instruction?

- can older students, parents and other community members help with after-school tutoring for students who have fallen behind?



Tips

Schedule flexible learning shifts. If not all students can return to school, a shift system can be organized, if possible, to include:

- daily multiple shifts, where students study part of the day at home and part at school;
- weekly multiple shifts, where each child comes to school a few days per week; and
- specific grades – only certain children attend due to priority based on age group or those who are preparing for high-stakes exams.

Identify and support at risk learners. It is important to quickly identify the most disadvantaged learners including disabled children, those from minority groups as well as those travelling long distances. It would be good to reflect on these groups in your area and draw up lists of learners to contact parents and caregivers to ensure their return to school. It is also important to consider what means can be implemented to ensure greater involvement of these learners, including making schools more accessible for disabled learners and organizing travel companions for students who live a long distance away from school.

Use lessons learnt to improve ICT skills. Training or peer support sessions on using high- and low-tech teaching can be based on experiences and lessons learnt during the school closures. This includes both the skills to use the technologies as well as skills to use them to enhance teaching and learning. It also includes developing skills related to lesson planning for blended environments, using child-centred, self-directed learning activities, organization, multi-tasking and time-management.

Keep it simple. Few teachers can transition to online or blended learning environments quickly and effectively. It is therefore advisable for teachers to select teaching methods that more easily translate to online learning, including the use of lectures or self-study materials in addition to complex learner-centred and project-based approaches.

Create peer support networks. Consider working with leaders and staff from other schools to set up a peer support network for knowledge and experience, sharing of resources, mentoring, coaching, and other forms of support. For example, a [peer support network in Uganda](#) is taking advantage of the popularity of WhatsApp to ensure effective communication. See also information on effective low-cost peer support groups for teachers: [Three principles for supporting teacher effectiveness during COVID-19](#) (World Bank, 2020).

Use champions to support peers. Champion highly competent teachers who emerged during school closures or during the return to school, and ensure they are recognized and given incentives. A small number of highly motivated, competent teachers comfortable in the new school context will be able to give face-to-face and online support to peers as well as students in various ways.

Catch-up learning strategies. Various strategies are being considered in an effort to catch up with learning, following the extended school closures. The selection of such strategies needs to be based on scientific evidence concerning their effectiveness, to avoid wastage of resources, unnecessary burden on the education system, students and parents and to ensure improved learning outcomes. In support for the Global Education Coalition, Johns Hopkins University in partnership with Chiefs for Change, has issued a discussion paper presenting three common yet ineffective catch-up learning strategies and three strategies that yield results, based on evidence from the United States.

Source: [Don't Remediate, Accelerate!](#) Effective catch up learning strategies – evidence from the United States, Johns Hopkins University, 2020

What school leaders say

UNICEF Teacher training package

UNICEF's Middle East and North Africa branch has developed a comprehensive training package for teachers, *Ready to Come Back: Teacher Preparedness Training Package*. The training package aims to address the immediate emerging needs for health and safety measures, learning loss, and mental health and well-being in schools and classrooms. The information presented is developed for educators, teachers and education staff across the Middle East and North Africa region in mind, but can be easily adapted to any context.

Source: [Ready to Come Back: Teacher Preparedness Training Package](#), UNICEF, 2020

Adapting government guidelines with teachers

One head teacher in Pakistan has used focus group discussions with teachers to adapt the standard operating procedures provided by the government in relation to school reopening. The focus groups allowed teachers to discuss different aspects of the new procedures, including adapting curricula and assessments, and how they will be implemented within their school context. Where possible, school leaders can ask members of their school leadership team to apply different parts of the new protocols, so as to divide and share the workload. In Indonesia, school leaders have established task forces to deal with all aspects of the school reopening, including the adaptation of school curriculum and lesson development. In India, school leaders have worked with leadership teams to develop school re-opening plans that cover health, emotional and academic needs.

Using professional learning communities

In Rwanda, VVOB is using a professional learning communities (PLC) approach, working with school leaders to help them support their teaching communities. Two face-to-face PLC meetings are organised for each school leader to meet with peers to discuss school safety, online teaching and preparing teaching and learning for school reopening. For each PLC session, a guiding question is proposed and a checklist is provided to school heads, who can facilitate the discussions and the sharing of experiences and good practices. For each PLC session, follow up actions will be documented for the school improvement plan that will guide school leaders when Rwanda's schools reopen. Gender and equity are covered as cross-cutting issues.

Source: [Professional Learning Communities – A toolkit for school leaders in back-to-school efforts after COVID-19 closures](#), VVOB – education for development, Rwanda

Scenario planning

School leaders in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have described how they are working with three reopening scenarios. In the United Arab Emirates, scenario A is a blended learning approach in which half of the students return to school and the other half work online at any given time. In scenario B, 70% of students return to school and 30% learn online, and in scenario C, 100% of students returning to the school. For example, in scenario A, "Group A" of 15 students attends school for the first week while adhering to all the precautionary measures. At the same time, "Group B" covers the same lesson at home online.

“ Teachers need more attention as they return to school. This means listening to their needs, protecting their safety and well-being, and helping them adapt their approaches to teaching and learning. ”

School leader, Palestine



Resources & further reading

- [Technologies for Teacher Professional Development](#), Information for Development Program (INFODEV), 2005
- [Supporting the continuation of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Annotated resources for online learning](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020
- [Enabling Teachers: Teacher Professional Development](#), Save the Children, 2020
- [Girl's Education Challenge - Keeping in contact with girls safely](#), UK Aid, 2020
- [COVID-19 : 10 Recommendations to plan distance learning solutions](#), UNESCO, 2020
- [Skills development during the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing for recovery](#), UNESCO, 2020
- [Early Years – online safety advice](#), Government of Australia, 2020



V. STAFF DEPLOYMENT, RIGHTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The return to school could result in some teacher gaps. School leaders can identify these and monitor strategies to ensure they are resolved. However, since the return to school could also result in extra demands on teachers (for instance, extra shifts) school leaders will therefore be key for protecting **the rights and working conditions of teachers and education support staff**, ensuring they comply with national teaching standards and labour laws.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Staff scheduling

Have you considered:

- monitoring teacher gaps that might arise during the return to school process due to teacher attrition, long term absences or classroom reorganization issues and communicated these to local education authorities?
- consulting with staff, teacher organizations, and local and central authorities about fair and equitable staffing arrangements to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of male and female teachers to cover adjusted school schedules?
- identifying volunteers (parents and community members) who can assist the teachers on a temporary basis?
- consulting with staff, teacher organizations, and local and central authorities about the workload that can reasonably be expected of teachers and other education support staff during the back to school process?
- if family obligations of male and female teachers need to be considered in rostering decisions for teaching staff?
- if members of your staff not able to return to service immediately and if so are they aware of their rights for leave and sick pay?
- if some members of staff considered more vulnerable to COVID-19?

- If yes, does the school have enough protective measures in place for them to return to work, or can they continue to work from home?
- If yes, can they continue to work from home and support remote/distance learning in teams/pairs with teachers who are back in the classroom?

Adapting working conditions

Have you considered:

- communicating clearly to newly recruited teachers about starting work, compensation, work schedules, incentive packages and other working conditions?
- clearly defining work objectives for teachers and education support staff (and how they will be evaluated) especially when the usual structures have been compromised in an emergency or post-crisis situation?
- consulting with staff, teacher organizations, and local and central authorities, as relevant, to review and revise staff supervision and support plans in light of the emergency context?
- postponing or adapting teacher performance evaluations to account for the impact of the crisis on the roles of staff and changes in teaching practices due to physical distancing measures?
- exploring how teachers and other staff can be recognized and rewarded in their performance evaluations for the extraordinary working conditions they have experienced and the skills that they are gaining during the COVID-19 crisis?

Rights of teachers and education support staff– Key points

- Increased responsibilities beyond current norms should not be mandatory.
- Measures such as double shifting should be reflected in teacher remuneration, benefits or other mechanisms to motivate teachers to accept additional responsibility.
- Amendments to employment and working conditions should be developed through social dialogue with staff and their representative organizations, including any changes to regular salary and benefits. Where appropriate, such changes can be done through collective bargaining.
- Sick leave should also take into consideration the need for teachers or staff to self-isolate if they present symptoms or come into contact with confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- Leave arrangements should also be in place for staff who need to take care of sick family members.



Tips

Postpone teacher evaluations. It would be best if teacher performance evaluations are postponed. If they do go ahead, they need to account for changes in teaching practices due to physical distancing measures. Where performance evaluations must be conducted, these should have a formative function that reviews how teachers have implemented innovative pedagogical approaches to ensure all children have access to continued learning opportunities and a socio-emotionally supportive learning environment.

Keep teachers motivated. Reach out to local and central authorities, and teacher organizations, as relevant, to work out how best to ensure teachers and other staff are paid in full and on time, and to explore other opportunities to ensure that staff members feel valued for their work. Special consideration will also have to be made to determine how best to retain female teachers, as teaching is frequently a female dominated profession, particularly at lower levels of the education system, and the continued engagement of female teachers is critical to ensuring girls return to school. UNESCO (2020) [Supporting teachers and education personnel during times of crises, Issue note 2.2](#)

What school leaders say

Ensuring teachers are not overburdened

In Indonesia, during school closures, one head teacher reported that some teachers were spending up to 80 hours a week giving online lessons and responding to students' questions. To relieve the burden on teachers of communicating with parents about the protocols to observe on returning, this school leader has encouraged separate group chats for students and for parents, being careful to allocate evenly each group among the teaching staff. This has also been helpful in ensuring that the group discussions are not dominated by "fake" information. In Oman, another school leader has worked to curb and control the number of school-related group chats and communications as a way to also reduce the workload the teaching community is dealing with.



Resources & further reading

- [Guiding principles on the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Education International, 2020
- [ILO Standards and COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, 1966](#), ILO & UNESCO, 1966
- [Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools](#), UNICEF, WHO & IFRC, 2020
- [Supporting teachers and education personnel during times of crises, Issue note 2.2](#), UNESCO, 2020



VI. FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND INVESTMENTS

Decisions to reopen largely depend on the capacity of schools to obtain or mobilize **budgets and acquire resources** needed to activate hygiene and sanitation protocols to ensure health and safety, as well as build the capacity of teachers to provide inclusive, quality learning. Creating **budgets earmarked for the COVID-19 response** should be a joint process between schools, which understand the needs on the ground, and the competent education authorities, which may be able to provide access to additional financing. In cases where schools have limited budgets and resources at their disposal, creative problem solving can help to mitigate shortages and facilitate resource acquisition.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Budgeting

Have you considered:

- identifying the school’s priorities based on social dialogue, teachers’ concerns, learners and the community which are achievable to inform budgeting decisions?
- costing the measures required to prepare for an inclusive, safe and healthy school reopening that offers quality teaching and learning?
- reviewing your budget to determine whether or not you can cover the following essential areas:
 - compliance with hygiene and sanitation protocols – i.e. costs needed to reconfigure classrooms, purchase essential supplies (PPE, soap, gel, toilet paper), and upgrade toilet and sanitation facilities?
 - staff salaries?
 - additional staff time and additional personnel to cover the teaching workload during the return to school?
 - psychological and socio-emotional support, training and preparation for staff?

- additional support and resources for the most vulnerable and at-risk learners?
- In the event of a budget shortfall in any of these essential areas, securing additional funding from local and central authorities, non-governmental organisations, the community, and family members; reprioritizing your spending plans; or accessing savings from utilities, transportation and supplies during lockdown?
- If no, are you expected to channel your existing funds to public health measures?
- If no, does your school have savings from utilities, transportation and supplies during the school closures that can be reallocated to priority areas including PPE, extra staffing costs and training?
- If no, will families be expected to contribute?
- reviewing school supply chains to ensure these can operate safely following reopening?

Collective resource mobilization

Have you considered:

- speaking with local, district or central authorities about your budgeting needs?
- consulting with local associations, health clinics, NGOs and potential partners in the business community to assess how they could support the return-to-school effort through monetary donations; the supply of sanitation materials and PPE; teaching and learning or other resources?
- exploring possibilities for the school to cooperate with local counselling networks and organizations to provide psychological and socio-emotional support for teachers and learners? **(see also Section III)**
- exploring possibilities for cooperation with local organizations to ensure that social safety nets are in place for vulnerable learners returning to the classroom (e.g., through food voucher schemes, access to food pantries, take-home rations)? (see also Section III)
- exploring possibilities for partnering with local CSOs, NGOs, and the business community to lessen the burden on households with students continuing to learn remotely (e.g. free Internet vouchers, computer grants/ loans)?
- where insufficient internet connectivity and devices exist, preparing an emergency plan to ensure continued access for distance learning in the case of future school closures and learning disruptions.



Tips

Business and financial management. Explore different ways of managing school finances as schools reopen. See the checklist in this [Opportunity International handbook](#).

Identify priorities. The COVID-19 crisis and return to school could provide opportunities to put into action a number of highly relevant and desired projects to improve the school's context and resources. However, it is necessary to ensure that priorities (in particular health and safety issues) are covered first before issues that are not considered essential to the COVID-19 response.

Engage stakeholders. Engage stakeholders in assessing additional financial needs. Communicate the financial needs of the school transparently to key stakeholders and potential partners to collectively assess and prioritize the needs. Then engage them in financial planning. The earlier they are engaged in the process, the more likely that they will support the resource mobilization efforts.

Focus on efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. Facing the unprecedented challenge, speed may be prioritized. But efficiency, effectiveness and accountability are critically important to ensure sustainability of the interventions.

What school leaders say

Reallocating finances

The COVID-19 school closures and reopening are putting financial strain on school budgets. Several school leaders have talked about the need to reallocate funds to meet the safety needs of school reopening. One school in India has had to reallocate 35% of its budget to sanitation and cleaning. In Egypt, one school has had to reduce fees to help parents facing financial difficulties, resulting in a drop in revenues. As a result, they have reached out to the school community for volunteers and in-kind support. For example, parents who are doctors and nurses have volunteered to help explain health and safety to the school community. Others, such as plumbers and builders, have helped with school maintenance.



Resources & further reading

- [COVID-19 Response Toolkit](#), UNESCO-McKinsey, 2020
- [COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [Pathways to reopening](#), Opportunity International
- [Anticipated impact of COVID-19 on public expenditures on education and implication for UNESCO work](#), Issue note 7.2, UNESCO, 2020
- [The impact of the crisis on public expenditure on education: findings from the UNESCO quick survey](#), UNESCO, 2009
- [Mobilizing resources for education and improving spending effectiveness](#), World Bank Group, 2019
- [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education financing](#), World Bank Group, 2020
- [The COVID-19 pandemic: Shocks to education and policy responses](#), World Bank Group, 2020



VII. Monitoring and evaluation of schools reopening efforts

As schools reopen, it will be critical to monitor and evaluate the situation and adapt as necessary. School leaders should adapt and use easy-to-use frameworks for measuring and benchmarking progress during the different planned phases. They can also take into account teachers' and education support staff's roles in providing quality teaching and fostering a safe learning environment.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Monitoring, review and adaptation

Have you considered:

- consulting with staff, teacher organizations and relevant local and national authorities to determine the types of information and evidence to be collected to better inform the school's crisis response plan, for example, teacher and learner attendance, teacher workload and learning outcomes?
- with your staff, and other relevant stakeholders (including, for example, PTAs and SMCs), developing a monitoring and evaluation plan to determine the effectiveness of the return-to-school effort and ongoing crisis response, including defining clear roles and responsibilities in the areas of data collection, analysis, documentation and reporting?
- with your staff, reviewing, adapting, and updating available systems for monitoring and tracking children's return, re-enrolments and retention based on learner group, for example, your school census forms used for the national Education Management Information System (EMIS)?
- identifying a system or mechanism for collecting specific COVID-19-related data, including suspected cases of infection and illness, contact tracing, and incidents of stress and anxiety, and put into place the support services needed, if possible? **(See also Section III)**
- identifying a system of mechanism for monitoring the situation of vulnerable and at-risk learners, including out-of-school children?

- ensuring that staff have been informed and consulted about any additional monitoring and reporting obligations they may have related to the return-to-school effort?

- identifying a system or mechanism for staff, learners and families to share their concerns about health and safety and their ideas for promoting a safe, inclusive learning environment?

- planning for a regular review of the school's COVID-19 response once the school has reopened, bringing together different actors to assess the situation, to adapt strategies, and to inform future actions with regard to the health crisis, and linking this review to the school improvement or development plan, if there is one?

- planning for regular assessments of student learning, including through remedial teaching, accelerated learning programmes and tutoring? **(See also Section IV)**

Tips

Carry out a school needs assessment to determine the number of learners and teachers in need of support in different areas, including school feeding, psychosocial support, WASH and additional educational support. You can adapt this [Joint Education School Needs Assessment](#) Form, which was developed as part of the Ebola response.

Identify key indicators. Keep in mind the following key principles about defining clear and measurable indicators linked to outcomes to enable effective monitoring and evaluation of your COVID-19 response efforts:

Key indicators should be:

- limited in number and focused on the major priorities;
- based on data and information that can be collected easily over time to provide time series;
- presented in a results-based or outcome-oriented framework, to meaningfully measure results;
- formulated to enable an analysis of disparities or disequilibria (by gender, urban/rural, disadvantaged populations) in policy implementation; and
- consistent and stable throughout the implementation cycle and, most important, easily understandable by all users, from top-level decision-makers to the most directly affected users, i.e. teachers and learners.

For guidance on ensuring that indicators are agreed with and accepted by all stakeholders, see the [Teacher Policy Development Guide](#), page 112

Monitoring post COVID-19 enrolment. The Joint McKinsey-UNESCO toolkit on school reopening covers the need to track different aspects of enrolment to ensure that all students are returning to school. This includes setting targets for and tracking student enrolment, engagement, participation, retention and performance. The toolkit offers tips and tools to support enrolment, including modifying rules on the school starting age, widening school feeding programmes, and reaching out to parents and community leaders to help ensure that children return to school.

Source: [COVID-19 response - Re-enrolment: identifying students at risk of dropout and encouraging a return to school, with a focus on girls](#), UNESCO-McKinsey toolkit, 2020



Resources & further reading

- [Guidelines for transitional education plan preparation](#), Global Partnership for Education, 2016
- [INEE Minimum standards for education: Preparedness, response and recovery](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2012
- [INEE Technical Note on Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic, INEE Minimum standards for education: Preparedness, response and recovery](#), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2020
- [Trends Shaping Education Spotlights 21 - Coronavirus special edition: Back to school](#), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020
- [Teacher Policy Development Guide](#), UNESCO, 2019
- [COVID-19 Response Toolkit](#), UNESCO-McKinsey, 2020



The International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 is a global and independent alliance. Members are national governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international development agencies, civil society organizations, private sector organizations and UN agencies that work together to promote teacher-related issues.

The Teacher Task Force Secretariat is hosted at UNESCO's Headquarters in Paris.
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A full list of resources as well as a **Guidance for policy-makers** is available on-line at
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Second edition: September, 2020