

School Reintegration



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Literature Review

Used to design solutions

How do we prepare schools for the prospect of reopening after such a long period of closure?

As the pandemic in India has moved away from a permanent lockdown approach to an approach of periodic lockdowns and relaxations to deal with successive waves of the Covid-19 pandemic and as children spend more time receiving poorer quality remote learning (Sonneman and Goss), the question arises: how do we prepare schools for the prospect of reopening after such a long period of closure?

To answer this question, we wanted to understand what research can tell us about areas of concern after lengthy school closure and ways to address these challenges, so that we can effectively bring students back to school. It is important to keep in mind that most of this research is from North American and European contexts.

The first area of concern is **relationships** (Barnum and Belsha; Sonneman and Goss). Most members of the school community will have spent the majority of the past year with their families, away from their colleagues and friends, so slowly rebuilding that comfort and familiarity will be crucial. It will be essential to rebuild trust and manage fear around school reopening (Carvalho et al.; UNICEF). The most important relationships to focus on are teacher-student, parent-school and teacher-teacher. Try to create opportunities for low-stakes interactions between these members where they can casually meet and rebuild relationships. For example, games outside of class time for students and teachers to interact; an event for parents to share their thoughts about the new school year, unrelated to their child's academic performance. It will also be important to engage directly with parents and the community through physical outreach work, perhaps using volunteers (Carvalho et al.).

The second area of concern that emerged is the **need to assess the extent of "learning loss"** (Huong and Jatturas; Kuheld and Tarasawa) or the levels of student ability at the time of reopening. Some points to keep in mind here are that learning decline or slowing will be uneven among students (Huong and Jatturas), so differential support is required. The extent of decline is typically greater for older age groups and for maths as opposed to literacy (Kuheld and Tarasawa). However, research by the Azim Premji Foundation has shown that 92% of students have lost one language ability from the previous year and 82% of students have lost one mathematical ability from the previous year.

The third area of concern is **remediation, both short-term and long-term** (Kaenberger). Emergency remediation helps children acquire the basic capabilities they will require to continue learning, such as basic literacy and numeracy, while long-term remediation helps students build back up to the appropriate overall learning levels. For basic literacy and numeracy support, which will be essential, providing support based on a student's learning level is particularly helpful. In addition, it might be necessary to simplify the curriculum to address only essential educational needs (Carvalho et al.; UNICEF).

The fourth area of concern is mental health and socio-emotional learning (Barnum and Belsha). Children may have faced a number of challenges due to being at home for an extended period of time, as well as challenges adjusting to the social environment of school after an extended period away. Things to keep in mind are: building children's comfort being around people, particularly given Covid-19 infection fears; building peer relationships; building teacher-student relationships; building school-parent relationships.

The fifth area of concern is physical health (Huong and Jatturas; World Bank). One aspect of physical health will of course be ensuring Covid-19-related provisions, such as washing facilities and social distancing measures as necessary, but also ensuring opportunities for movement and physical play after a long period at home and away from peers. In addition, providing free school meals can address malnutrition as well as encourage parents to return their children to school.

The final area is focussing on vulnerable groups (Carvalho et al; UNICEF). The burden of school closure will be felt most by vulnerable groups and they may also be the least likely to adapt effectively to school return or to return to school at all. For example, girls may face the pressure of domestic responsibilities in addition to schoolwork, or to get married young due to the perception of a financial burden to the family during a time of economic hardship. Factors like gender, caste and economic vulnerability could lead to student challenges. While work on these areas of concern will need to be contextualised for specific circumstances, as well as timed appropriately so that school members are not overwhelmed, these should provide approaches to considering school operations immediately before and after school reopening. In addition, these areas were often neglected even prior to the pandemic, therefore work on these areas can help schools function more effectively in general, with the current situation being the spark for change.

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