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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you considered:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• reviewing guidance received from your ministry and the World Health Organization and consulting with competent health and education authorities regarding school reopening?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• consulting with teachers and their representative organizations and other education personnel at your school about the general plan for your school’s reopening?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 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? <em>(See also Section II)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discussing safety and health protocols with teachers and education support staff (nurses, caretakers, guards, food-service staff and bus drivers)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discussing guidelines to support each other’s well-being with teachers and education support staff (nurses, caretakers, guards, food-service staff and bus drivers)? <em>(See also Section III)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• designating a focal point or a task team for COVID-19 risk prevention, which regularly consults with staff and their representatives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**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 Save the Children’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.
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
- **Safe Back to School: A Practitioner’s Guide**, Save the Children, 2020