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 leaners 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.

📖 *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