

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2022

GUIDE FOR LEARNING RECOVERY AND ACCELERATION:

Using the RAPID Framework to Address COVID-19 Learning Losses and Build Forward Better

June 2022



BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation



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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented interruptions to schooling, and data show substantial learning losses around the world. Additionally, drop-out rates are increasing in some countries, along with early marriage, early pregnancy, child labor, and mental health issues. These effects have occurred in a context of already high learning poverty: before the pandemic, 53% of children in low-and middle-income countries were unable to read a simple text by age 10, and the rates of improvement in learning were already very slow. During the COVID-19 pandemic, after lengthy school closures and remote instruction that was less efficient than learning in schools and was provided with unequal access, the learning poverty rate could reach as high as 70%.

Future learning and decades of economic and social gains are at stake: urgent action is needed to ensure this generation of students receives an education that is at least as good as that from past and future generations.

Framework: Establishing a learning recovery program



Reach every child and keep them in school



Assess learning levels regularly



Prioritize teaching the fundamentals



Increase the efficiency of instruction including through catch-up learning



Develop psychosocial health and wellbeing

A contextually suitable Learning Recovery Program can help recover and accelerate learning. This document introduces a framework of five policy actions to establish such a program. While the first two policy actions (i.e., reaching and retaining students and assessing learning levels regularly) support an equitable recovery, including monitoring and planning, the remaining three policy actions constitute strategies to improve teaching, learning, and wellbeing. The composition of the program should be thought of as flexible—a menu of policy options—for countries to select, combine, and adapt to their context.

COVID-19 disruptions have generated learning losses around the world

Children around the world lost an enormous amount of classroom time. At the peak in April 2020, it is estimated that pandemic-related school closures disrupted education for over 1.6 billion children in 188 countries. Globally, from February 2020 until February 2022, education systems were on average **fully closed for in-person schooling about 141 instructional days**, with the world's poorest children disproportionately affected.

Substantial losses in math and reading have been documented in low-, middle-, and high-income countries. Emerging evidence from countries like [Brazil](#), [Italy](#), [Kenya](#), [Czech Republic](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Pakistan](#), and others show stark differences in performance between current and pre-pandemic cohorts.

A recent [analysis](#) of 36 studies measuring learning loss in different countries finds that learning losses on average amount to 0.17 of a standard deviation, **equivalent to roughly one-half year's worth of learning.**

AFRICA



South Africa: grade 2 students incurred learning losses equivalent to up to [70%](#) of a year of learning

Malawi: grade 4 students lost the equivalent to [two years](#) of learning

EUROPE



Netherlands: students lost the equivalent to [20%](#) of a school year

United Kingdom: [two months](#) of learning lost in reading, among primary and secondary students

ASIA



Rural Karnataka, India: only [16%](#) of grade 3 students could perform simple subtraction in 2020, compared to nearly 24% in 2018

Cambodia: students who failed to demonstrate basic proficiency increased [from 34% to 45%](#) in the Khmer language and from 49% to 74% in mathematics

LATIN AMERICA

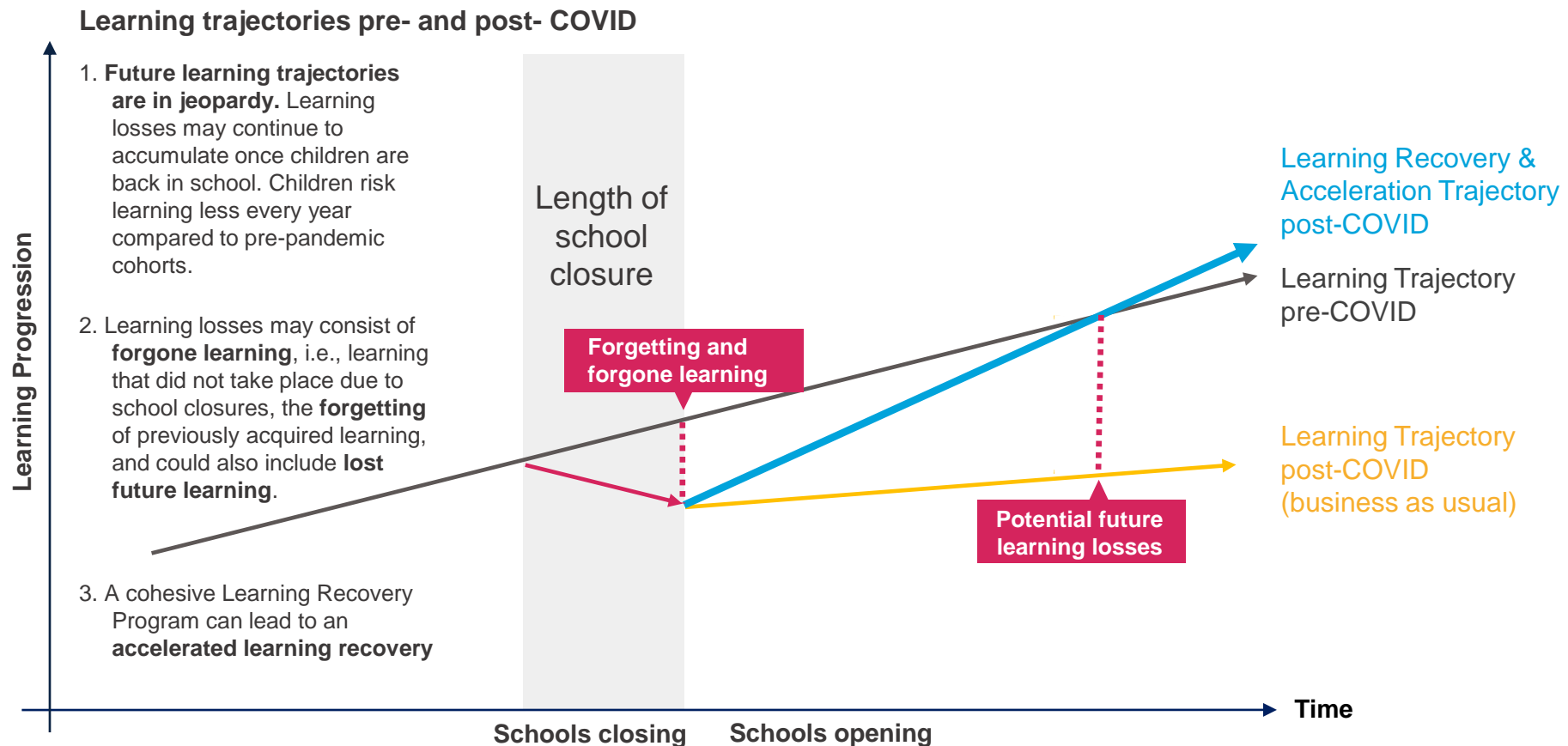


São Paulo, Brazil: students learned only [28%](#) compared to if face-to-face classes had continued

Mexico: significant [learning losses](#) in basic numeracy and literacy

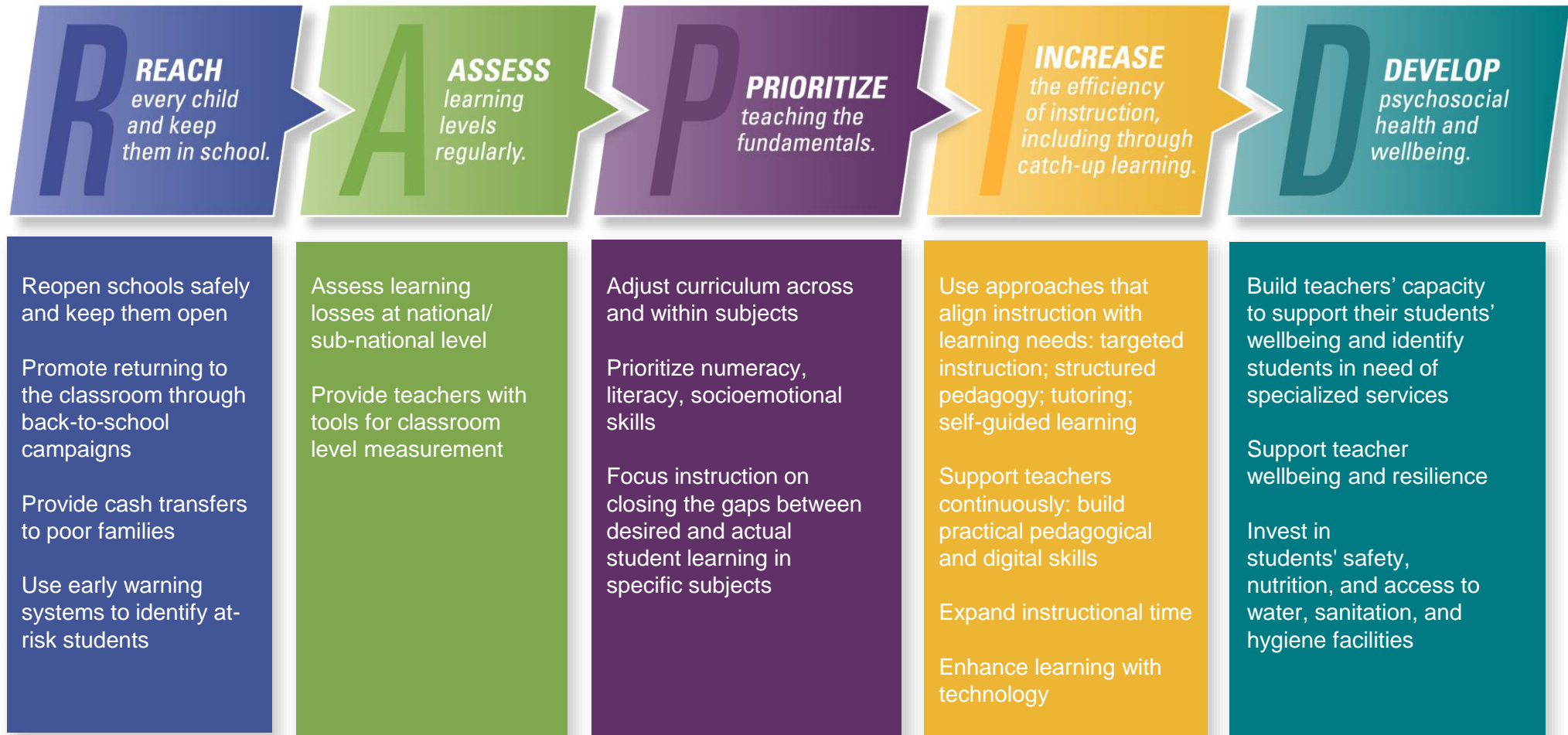
Future learning is at risk without action

As schools have reopened, it has been tempting to resume business as usual, on the assumption that once children are back in classrooms their learning will soon get back on track. This would be a mistake. To avoid a permanent impact on the human capital accumulation of this generation, countries need to focus on reversing those losses and accelerating learning.



A RAPID Framework for Learning Recovery & Acceleration

A **contextually adapted** learning recovery program, consisting of a mix of evidence-based strategies to recover learning, can help get students back on their pre-pandemic learning trajectories.



Reach every child and keep them in school

Encourage, monitor, and support return to schools

To recover learning, all children need to be back in school. Action is needed to ensure all children return and stay in school. Three buckets of actions can help 1) reopen schools and keep them open; 2) implement early warning systems and back-to-school campaigns; and 3) provide free schooling, meals and cash transfers.

Ensure all children return and stay in school

1. Reopen and keep all schools open
2. Back-to-school campaigns, early warning systems and family involvement
3. Free schooling, meals and cash transfers

For additional information, explore the following external resource: [COVID-19 Response: Re-Enrollment](#). UNESCO. 2020.

Reopening schools and keeping schools open is a pre-requisite for learning recovery. Remote learning was not as effective as in-person schooling, even in high-income countries. Learning losses were significant, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds were often [disproportionately affected by learning losses](#), showing the importance of keeping schools open.

Back-to-school communication campaigns, both general and targeted to at-risk students, can help increase attendance or re-enrollment rates. It is important to communicate to parents that it is safe to send children back to school, as [parental concerns about health risks](#) may prevent children from returning, as well as the value of schooling and learning.

Early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out can help improve student retention. Drop-out is multi-causal, which is why it is important to go beyond attendance and student achievement, and consider how factors like financial constraints, family situation, peers, and lack of community support affect a student's risk of dropping out.

Involving families in children's education. Parents and caregivers are central actors in their children's education, especially during the early years. Family and the community around the child affect the likelihood of a child going to and staying in school. Providing parents with information on the [benefits, costs and quality of education](#), can improve school participation. Systems should strengthen teacher-parent relationships and encourage families and communities to play an active role in children's education.

Removing school fees, offering free school meals, or giving families cash transfers. Robust evidence from around the world shows that when financial constraints are relaxed by removing costs, [school participation is likely to increase](#). While nearly all countries offer free primary school, fees for lower secondary school remain in 24 countries, and for upper secondary school in 40 countries.

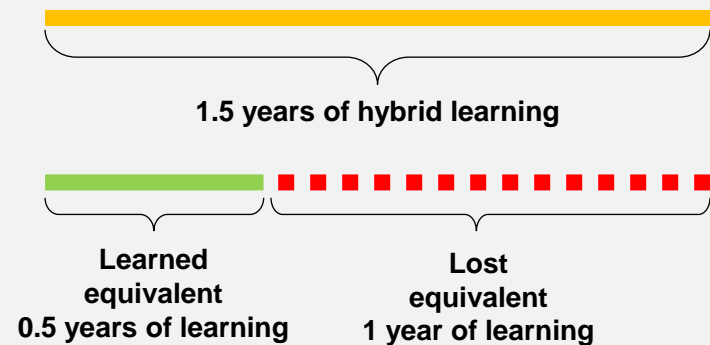
Assess learning levels regularly

Understanding children's current learning levels in the classroom and estimating learning losses at a systemic level allows teachers and policymakers alike to make informed decisions about the instructional approaches and other policy decisions needed to promote learning recovery.

Two main types of assessments for recovery:

System-level: At a national or regional level, baseline measures of learning can help policymakers understand the scale of the learning challenge, trends in learning over time, and inequalities in student learning, which can help them make informed decisions on where and how to mobilize resources to reverse learning poverty and drop-out among those most vulnerable. Estimating **how much** learning was lost, as well as **what specific content** was lost, can help the country design appropriate learning recovery strategies. Expressing learning losses as a share of a year's worth of learning can help focus the policy conversation on the urgent need to fight learning poverty and be a critical tool to mobilize action and resources for learning recovery.

Classroom-level: In addition to system-level data, it is vital to have quality classroom-level data about the performance of students. Diagnostic and formative assessments can help teachers and school leaders adapt teaching plans and pedagogical approaches to best help students learn. Classroom assessments are critical to implement recovery strategies like targeted instruction, which groups students by their learning levels, and for monitoring the effectiveness of learning recovery interventions. Assessments can help teachers understand progress against curricular standards and provide children responsive and on-going learning support.



Illustrative Example (*please note actual school closures and learning losses varied widely*):

1. Students missed 1.5 years of regular schooling, which was replaced by hybrid learning
2. Hybrid learning helped mitigate the learning loss, but was less effective than regular schooling, so students only learned the equivalent of, for instance, 0.5 years of learning
3. Students are now 1 year of learning behind as they return to school

Prioritize teaching the fundamentals

The pandemic shock represents a crucial opportunity to conduct much-needed adjustment to better align curricula with pressing needs. As COVID-related education disruptions have pushed students behind their grade-appropriate learning levels, adhering inflexibly to the curriculum risks presenting students with material they are not prepared to learn. If they move through the curriculum without first mastering the key foundational concepts they need, their ability to progress on to more complex topics with adequate understanding will be jeopardized. Countries should adjust teaching plans to prioritize teaching the fundamentals in the time they have available.

Teaching plans should prioritize foundational skills and conceptual pre-requisites

Foundational learning refers to the key skills that are the daily gateway to subsequent learning in an expanding number of subjects and disciplines. These refer to key skills in **reading** and **mathematics**, and increasingly also critical **digital skills** and **socioemotional competencies**.

Antecedents and pre-requisites are content that must be learned prior to learning subsequent content in the learning series.

Determining what is foundational or 'antecedent' is not always easy; opinions vary, and expert judgment may be needed to come to consensus. However, common criteria used to determine priority skills and knowledge areas include:

- **Endurance:** What skills/knowledge last beyond the current grade or course, and/or are needed in graduates' daily life?
- **Leverage:** What skills/knowledge can be used across subject areas?
- **Readiness for next level:** What skills/knowledge are antecedents/pre-requisites for later learning topics in the trajectory?

What does this look like in practice?

Several countries have adjusted their curricula in order to prioritize fundamental skills and knowledge as a learning recovery response during COVID-19. These have not taken the form of large-scale curricular reforms, but rather relatively quick curricular and instructional adaptations.

This has involved:

- Rebalancing time allocations to devote more time to foundational skills in literacy and numeracy
- Focusing on key competencies within these focus areas; streamlining duplicate content; integrating topics based on logical connections
- Publishing updated learning objectives and outcomes; and producing updated curricular documents, teacher guides, evaluation criteria, etc.
- Providing schools greater flexibility to adjust teaching plans to their students' needs

See the cases of [Chile](#), [Ecuador](#), [Guyana](#), [South Africa](#), and [Vietnam](#).

Increase the efficiency of instruction including through catch-up learning

Policy options and strategies

To recover from learning losses, school systems will need to support initiatives that increase the amount of learning within classrooms, through more effective teaching practices and learner-focused recovery strategies that can help all students make gains on their learning. Improving the quality of teaching and targeting it to the level of the student are among the most crucial interventions for reversing the decline in learning progress.

Five evidence-based approaches for recovering and accelerating learning that countries can select, combine, and adapt are:

TARGETED INSTRUCTION

Aligns instruction to the learning levels of students by grouping them according to their level of proficiency—not their age or grade—for a dedicated time of the day. It is considered one of the most effective models for accelerating learning in low-performing students.

STRUCTURED PEDAGOGY

A coherent package of investments that work together to improve instruction. Key components include high-quality teaching and learning materials (i.e., teacher guides); ongoing teacher training and coaching; and continuous student assessment.

TUTORING

One-on-one or small-group instructional programming that supplements learning by giving students individualized attention and targeting instruction towards identified areas where students most need support or practice. Efficacy depends on group size and frequency of sessions.

SELF-GUIDED LEARNING PROGRAMS

Enable students to progress incrementally towards mastery of foundational skills at his or her own pace, with limited input from a teacher. The activities can be assisted by technology or be pencil-and-paper based.

EXPANDING LEARNING TIME

Expanding the time students spend learning is another strategy for accelerating learning. To be effective, additional time should be used for high-quality instruction, have clear learning goals, ensure high attendance (if voluntary), and be weighed against downsides such as the potential for burnout and stress.

Country highlights

Brazil: is scaling a learning recovery [program](#) that provides targeted instruction to groups of students with similar learning needs, during four, two-week periods in the school day.

Jordan: delivered hybrid [home learning packages](#) to children in grades 4-9 with cross-curricular material to help them review and practice key concepts at their own pace during school closures. After school reopening, they continue to be used as an instrument for learning recovery.

Mozambique: is strengthening learning readiness through an early-grade literacy [program](#) that provides scripted lesson plans, teacher training and coaching, and frequent assessment.

Increase the efficiency of instruction including through catch-up learning

Supporting teachers to perform

Support Teacher Resilience

As education systems pivoted to remote learning, many teachers experienced increased demands and heightened complexity to their jobs. Teachers need to be adequately supported so that they, in turn, can support their students and accelerate their learning. To support teacher resilience:

- **Check in on teachers** through mechanisms to detect and mitigate signs of burnout, including screening mechanisms, enhanced communication and guidance, and peer support groups
- **Enhance intrinsic motivation** by highlighting teachers' contributions; share success stories; connecting teachers
- **Build teachers' psychosocial resilience** through counseling, trainings, and other tools

Support Teachers Instructionally

Teachers have the challenging job of teaching a generation of students who are far behind in learning compared to previous cohorts. To do so, teachers will need support to implement strategies for recovery and acceleration and to utilize assessments as a tool to inform instruction. To support teachers instructionally:

- **Support teachers in implementing recovery strategies** through practical training and guidance, including coaching and in some cases structured lesson plans
- **Equip teachers to assess students** through support to implement assessment tools accurately, record and interpret data, and use it to make instructional decisions
- **Prepare teachers to support students' psychosocial wellbeing** through in-school strategies, and to identify students that require specialized support

Support Teachers Technologically

Blended and hybrid learning is here to stay, not only as a way to prepare education systems for future shocks, but also to enhance education delivery today. To support teachers technologically:

- **Provide teachers with access to technology**, which requires investments in hardware and connectivity
- **Build teacher skills in how to use technology** to enhance educational delivery. Training should help teachers judge when technology enhances instruction and when it does not.
- **Help teachers use technology to remediate gaps in learning** – for instance, for implementing assessments, using peer-to-peer support groups, using self-guided learning programs, and others.

Develop psychosocial health and wellbeing

Safeguarding learning and wellbeing of children and youth requires us to invest in understanding and addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related disruptions on children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, and other drivers of overall wellbeing including safety, nutrition, and access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

1. Provide mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS): Studies paint a worrying picture of worsening mental health issues among children and youth, including increases in depression, stress and anxiety, and behavioral problems. Interventions that have been utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic include helplines and other forms of remote psychosocial supports (telephone counseling, radio programs); psychosocial interventions in school; teacher professional development on how to provide MHPSS; and supports for teachers' wellbeing (peer-to-peer groups; workshops).

2. Bolster school-based nutrition services and feeding programs: Children are ready to learn when they are healthy and well-nourished. During the pandemic, promising country interventions have included shifting to a school meal collection or delivery model during prolonged or intermittent school closures (Costa Rica), expanding school feeding programs to reach more children (Iran), and providing counseling on nutrition and breastfeeding through the health sector (Mongolia).

3. Safeguard student safety: Safety in learning environments is an important contributor to student, teacher, and school-level outcomes. Interventions to promote school safety include embedding school safety diagnostics and monitoring into education system's data management practices; instituting safe, anonymous procedures for reporting incidents inside and outside of school; and running information campaigns and workshops for parents and community members.

4. Implement school-based water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) responses: Evidence shows that increased access and use of WASH services promotes both health and educational benefits, including reducing school absenteeism and boosting students' cognitive skills and academic performance. During COVID-19, countries have: upgraded hygiene/sanitation facilities in schools, including making them gender-friendly (Mozambique); provided materials for handwashing and sanitation to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Ecuador), and trained teachers on sanitary hygiene practices, including strategies for teaching handwashing techniques to students (Kyrgyz Republic).

Dominican Republic: the government implemented a two-week psychological recovery [program](#) (developed by the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and USAID) during the first days of in-person instruction following school closures during COVID-19.

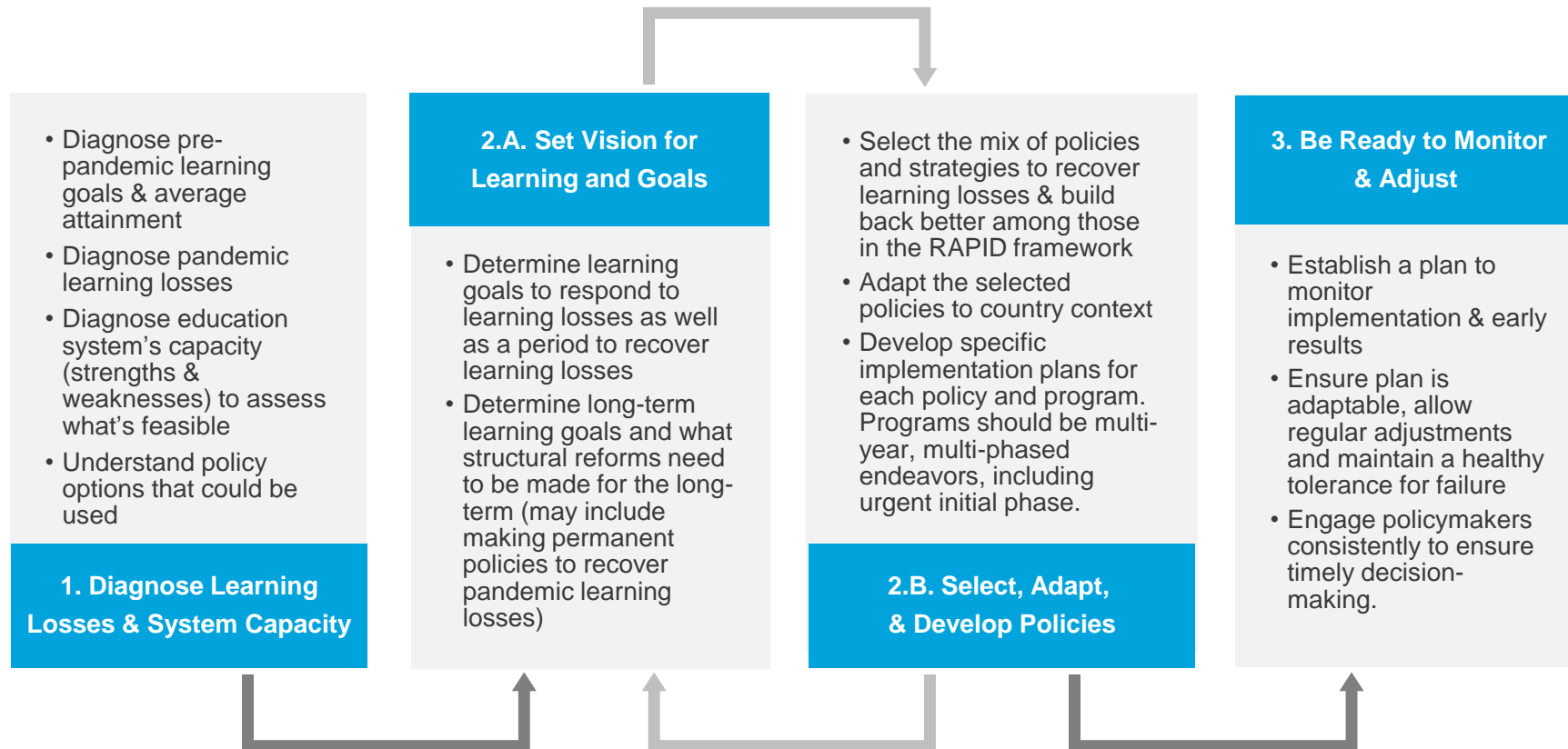
Costa Rica: the Ministry of Education ensured continuity of its school feeding program during school closures by establishing [collection sites](#) where food baskets could be collected by family members.

Nagaland, India: a World Bank-supported [project](#) will address school-related gender-based violence through development of education information systems that collect gender-disaggregated data; state-wide protocols for confidential reporting of incidents; and capacity-building and engagement of teachers, parents and the wider community.

Kyrgyz Republic: the country has [rehabilitated](#) water supply systems and installed handwashing and sanitation facilities in schools, and has trained teachers on sanitary hygiene practices.

Steps to establishing multi-year plans for recovering learning and building back better

Establishing a Learning Recovery Program requires strong political commitment, robust planning, and adequate public spending. It should be a multi-year and multi-phased endeavor; programs should take urgent action to address learning losses immediately, but may take multiple years to implement, as this generation needs to both recover their learning losses *and* improve on its pre-pandemic trajectory. During implementation, systems must have a high tolerance for failure and adjustment, given the unprecedented nature of this task. Monitoring, assessing progress, and adapting iteratively will all be critical.



Steps 2.A. and 2.B. are iterative: As one selects, adapts and develops policies it may be necessary to go back and readjust learning goals.



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