

Education Systems' Response to COVID-19

Brief: January 19th, 2021

- Globally, 720 million children (41% of student population) continue to be affected by full or partial school closures. School reopening trends saw a reverse in November that has continued in recent weeks, with many countries choosing to extend their holiday breaks till the surge is manageable.

	Africa	EAP	ECA	LAC and North America	MENA	SAR	Total
Closed	24	10	11	15	6	6	72
Open with limitations	24	15	39	27	15	2	122

Source: World Bank Education Team [COVID tracking database](#) and [map](#).



LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION

- **Europe reconsiders the safety of reopening schools after the holiday break.** [Many countries in Europe](#) are beginning this year with extending school closures driven in part by mounting concerns over the new more transmissible strains of COVID-19. [Germany announced a further extension of the hard lockdown](#) till February 14th – schools are to remain closed and instruction is exclusively online; kindergartens and pre-schools will offer emergency childcare as needed. The [UK](#), struggling with the spike in the new variant of COVID 19 has also [opted to close schools](#). In [Ireland](#), authorities reached agreement with the teachers' union to [bring back only those students with special needs](#) in a phased approach that begins January 22nd. [Italy](#), among the worst hit by COVID-19 with over 75,000 deaths, is [returning high schoolers only for half the time](#). [Greece](#) is following a similar policy with students from grades [7-12 starting remote learning until further notice](#).
- Distance Learning 2.0**

As students continue to adapt to distance learning, the most advanced economies are turning back towards using TV as a way to engage their young learners.

In the [UK](#), [the BBC will start showing curriculum-based programs](#), which will include three hours of primary school programming and at least two hours for secondary pupils. This policy comes amid concerns that low-income families may struggle to afford data packages for their children to take part in online learning. Similarly in the [United States](#), educators have teamed up with a broadcast channel and are using [“Lets Learn NYC”](#) to engage children of varied income levels.
- **Further east, lighter lockdowns are rolling out.** [Ukraine](#) began a [nationwide lockdown](#) on January 8th till the 24th, closing all schools except kindergartens. The measure is an effort to avoid overflowing the health system during what is historically peak flu season. [Lebanon](#), having originally mandated a partial lockdown in early January, shifted this week to [a full lockdown, barring residents from leaving their homes](#). When the semester begins in February, students will be exclusively learning remotely.
 - **In Asia, a second spike in infections is underway but policies on school closures are varied.** In [Malaysia](#), [schools have been closed since October](#), but the government plans to reopen by January 20th even though infection rates remain high. [Japan](#) has declared a state of emergency due to high rates of COVID-19, but

has opted to keep [schools open](#). In **Sri Lanka**, 11th grade “O Level” examinations have been rescheduled for March and the government has [made the decision to reopen schools beginning this week for early grades and by January 25th \(except for in the western province\) for 11th graders](#). In **India**, some states have reopened high schools, but still about 320 million students remain at home with [vulnerable students facing harsher consequences](#).

- **In North America**, the Government of **Canada** will keep schools closed for a week longer. [Exceptions of closures are limited to specialized schools](#) for vulnerable students. In the **United States**, policies are decentralized with some school systems open while others only offering remote learning. Congress is sending more relief money to schools, and the new Administration has announced it plans to return most students to school within 100 days of taking power. In the meantime, [coronavirus-related costs and declining state funding tied to student enrollment](#) are driving districts toward a financial crisis.
- **Across Africa, countries move towards school reopening after months of closure**. Schools in **Kenya** reopened in early January after being closed since March due to the coronavirus. But Kenya has [yet to contain the pandemic and there are concerns among teachers](#) and parents about being exposed to the infection. In **Ghana**, [all levels of public and private schools will reopen](#) this month after about a 9-month closure. In South Africa, [schools are scheduled to reopen](#) on January 27th.



RESEARCH AND LATEST FINDINGS

- **A recent study explores the relationship between distance learning and the mental health of proxy educators**. [Parents with children who struggled with distance learning experienced elevated mental distress](#). Given the relationship between teacher burnout and student outcomes, the study emphasizes the importance of supporting parents during this time to improve students’ schooling.
- **Latest research on the impacts of COVID-19 on learning summarized**. This Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel’s [report](#) on the “smart buys” for improving learning in low- and middle-income countries prepared by the World Bank, FCDO, and Building Evidence in Education.
- **School reopenings have an effect on hospitalization?** The [study](#), by the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice concluded that reopenings in the fall did not contribute to increased hospitalizations rates.
- **Using cellphone data to track movement to more than 100,000 schools in the USA, researchers at Columbia University found** that closed classrooms were disproportionately composed of nonwhite students, as well as students with low math scores or limited English proficiency or who are poor enough to qualify for free meals.
- **Professors from Harvard, Brown, Boston, and Tufts universities collaborated on a report**, titled [“Schools and the Path to Zero: Strategies for Pandemic Resilience in the Face of High Community Spread,”](#) that contends community transmission should no longer be the sole metric used to guide school opening decisions.
- **What do school closures mean for social mobility?** [Researchers in the UK](#) find that further closures of schools to contain the spread of coronavirus are likely to exacerbate educational inequalities. Learning losses could have long-term consequences for the life chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Concerns over educational gaps caused by online learning in Korea**. A recent survey by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education showed that 96% of respondents feel [there has been a learning gap since the beginning of the pandemic](#) and identified the biggest factors as level of academic interest of parents and students, private education, and family economic conditions.



RESOURCES

Reports and Surveys

- The ***WB EDU Response to COVID*** report (as of December 2020) summarizes operational, technical assistance, and knowledge work between March and December 2020 to support countries in their education response during the pandemic
- **The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence has created a free online course for Pre-K through 12th grade educators called “[Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty and Stress](#)”**. The course will provide participants with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to understand and manage their emotions and those of their students. The 10-hour online course is designed for school staff, including teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, principals, and non-teaching staff in preK-12 schools.
- **Brookings Institute reviews six trends and strategies** that if continued should help education systems [leapfrog towards a more equitable and relevant learning ecosystem](#). This includes the building of school emergency preparedness and realizing the potential of education technology.
- **UKFIET on lessons in safeguarding girls’ education during and after COVID-19**. The [publication](#) highlights the main challenges and lessons regarding girl’s education during and after lockdown.

World Bank Blogs, Events, and Other Resources

- Considering an adaptive learning system? A roadmap for policymakers. ([English](#))
- Promoting parental involvement in schools: Evidence from Mexico. ([English](#))
- The impact of African Scientists: How years of building scientific capacity in Africa have been a real game changer in the response to COVID 19 ([English](#), [French](#))
- A silent and unequal education crisis. And the seeds for its solution. ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Opening-up for a strong economic recovery: Lessons from the first wave of COVID-19 ([English](#))