

Education Systems' Response to COVID-19 - Special Edition Brief-

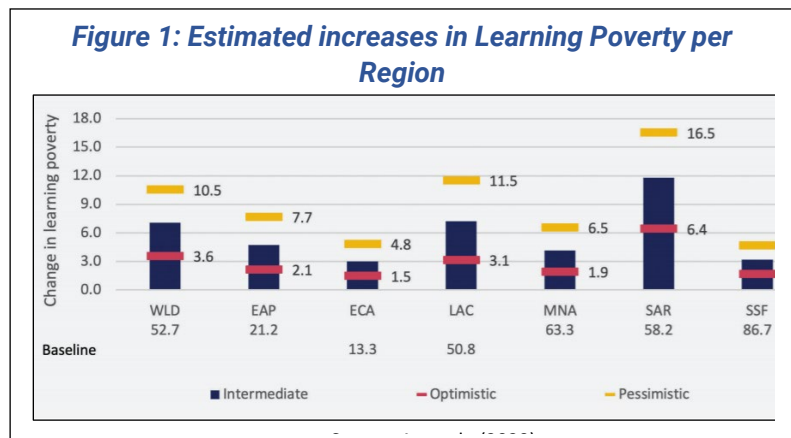
Growing Evidence on Learning Losses

December 20th, 2020



GROWING EVIDENCE SUGGEST LEARNING LOSSES ARE CLIMBING

- **Even before COVID-19, we were in a learning crisis.** [53 percent](#) of 10 year-olds in schools across low and middle income countries could not read and understand a simple text. This doesn't account for the [258 million](#) primary- and secondary-age kids that were out of school.
- **COVID-19 related school closures have made matters worse.** Abrupt [school closures in more than 180 countries](#) kept nearly 1.6 million children out of school most of spring. [Eight months later, half of those students are still out of school.](#) In Latin America students have lost an average of 159 net school days during the pandemic so far with very heterogeneous compensation through remote learning.



- **Losses seem to be accumulating rapidly, and it is expected that Learning Poverty might be increasing from 53% to 63% among primary school-age children.**¹ At regional levels (Figure 1), the loss seems to be greatest in South Asia (17 percentage points), and Latin America (12 percentage points).

- **What does all this really mean?** In June/2020 the World Bank estimated that the current student generation could lose [\\$10 trillion in lifetime labor earnings for kids in school, more if the closures are around 5 months.](#) This represents one tenth of global GDP, or half of the annual economic output of the United States, or twice the global annual public expenditure on primary and secondary education. Not only, the world seems to be moving to the more pessimistic scenario of 7 months of school closure, but a new **very pessimistic** scenario has been added in which 9 months or 90% of the academic year is lost. In those scenarios, the cumulative losses could add up from 16 to 20 trillion in lifetimes labor earnings (Azevedo et al, forthcoming).
- **How are individual countries faring?** [A simulation tool](#) to assess learning and economic losses at the country level has been administered in **Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Philippines, Colombia, Russia, Turkey, Vietnam.** Collectively, it highlights that despite heroic efforts of remote learning, there are various degrees of losses. In Chile, a joint study with the [Ministry of Education of Chile](#) found that if schools remain closed for 10 months (6 months have already been lost), students could lose on average [88% of the learning achievements](#) of one year, and the findings are being used as part of the current technical and political debate and to support efforts to prepare to open as soon as possible.

¹ This [estimate](#) corresponds to a post-COVID-19 scenario of no remediation and low mitigation effectiveness for the effects of school closures.



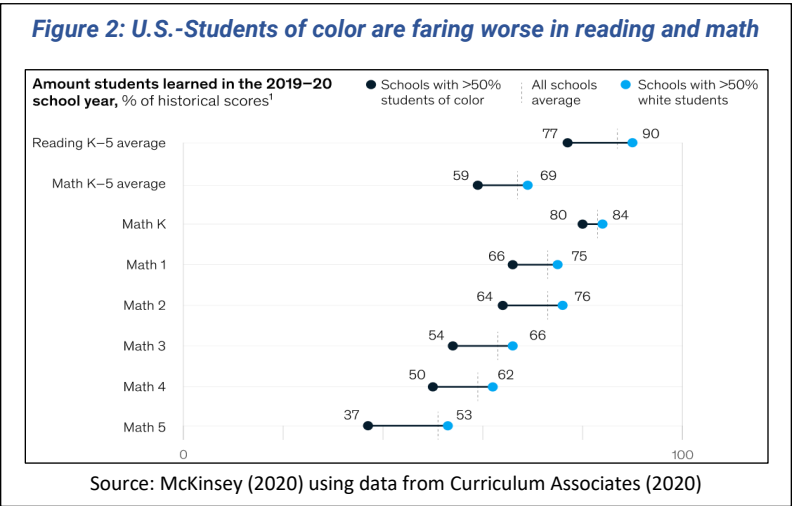
- **The losses seem to be excessively uneven, with those disadvantaged faring worst.** UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank have so far conducted two-rounds of a survey on government responses to COVID-19. [One in ten countries are not providing any additional support](#) to students during closures. Inequities in access to technology and resources has also put some groups at greater disadvantage to access remote learning, and likely to fall even further behind. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that 55% of children received some type of remote learning (a very small fraction including online learning), while the rest have been completely disengaged during school closures.
- **Updated learning data in high-income countries shows that learning losses are evident, and inequality is growing.** Despite their extensive technological reach and scope, [some European countries have experienced learning losses and increased inequality as a result of COVID 19](#). Table 1 below provides a comparison of losses across the countries examined, the highlights of which include:
 - [Netherlands](#): researchers found a decrease in student performance on a national exam equivalent to a fifth of a school year (roughly the actual time out of school due to the pandemic). Researchers also [uncovered a growing inequality in the Netherlands as of April 2020](#), likely due to children from better-off families receiving more parental support and having better remote learning environments.
 - [Belgium](#): researchers observed a decrease in mathematics performance of 0.19 standard deviations (SD) and a decrease in Dutch performance of 0.29 SD, with an increase in within-school inequality of 17% for math and 20% for Dutch.
 - [Switzerland](#): while secondary school pupils remain largely unaffected by the school closures in terms of learning outcomes, learning among primary school pupils learning has slowed down. They found that primary school students learned more than twice as fast attending school in person compared to those who were schooled using distance learning.
 - [UK](#): Using Year 7 Baseline Secondary writing assessment, researchers compared the cohort's progress over time and found that pupils are 22 months behind on their expected learning outcomes.

Table 1: Effect of school closure across key European countries on learning outcomes

Country	Length of closure	Subject	Level	Learning Loss
Belgium	3 months	Math	Primary	0.19 SD
		Dutch		0.29 SD
Netherlands	8 weeks	Math, spelling, reading	Primary	0.08 SD (equivalent to a fifth of a school year)
Switzerland	8 weeks	Math, German	Primary	Pupils attending in-person learn twice as fast when compared to those doing remote learning
			Secondary	Appears unaffected
UK	2 months	Writing	Secondary	Equivalent to 22 months



- o **In the United States**, a similar outcome is predicted. **Those who had the fewest academic opportunities before the pandemic are likely to exit with the greatest learning loss.** A [study by McKinsey](#) emphasizes [this](#) by highlighting the disparities between Black and Hispanic students in the US and their white peers (Figure 2). Students of color could be six to 12 months behind, compared with four to eight months for white students. **The study echoes a half dozen other national reports released in recent days.** They all find that students regressed because of lost classroom time, particularly in math, though the reports vary in degree of the losses and in disparity levels. A recent [report](#) by the US-based Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) showed that the average student in grades 3-8 who took a math assessment this fall scored 5 to 10 percentile points behind students who took the same test last year, with Black, Hispanic and poor students falling [even further behind](#).



- o [In Canada](#), [educators are also raising the alarm](#) as test results from across the country are showing a drop in academic performance.

A SECOND WAVE OF SCHOOL CLOSURES ARE MAKING MATTERS WORSE

Twenty million students saw their schools close again and their studies moved to remote instruction in recent days. This brings the global total of students physically out of school to 694 million, or 40% of student population (see table 2 below).

Table 2. COVID related school closures (nation-wide, partial, and reopening)

	Africa	EAP	ECA	LAC and North America	MENA	SAR	Total
Closed, partly closed	24	10	6	14	6	6	66
Open, open with limitation	24	15	44	28	15	2	128

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

- **Across Europe**, [Austria](#), [Greece](#), [Netherlands](#), and [Germany](#) are closing schools. In Asia, certain countries such as South Korea (Seoul) is also [transitioning towards the same](#).
- **Others are delaying the reopening of schools after the holiday season.** In the [USA](#), [certain states](#) have put off plans to reopen schools in the 2020-21 school year.



These and other **reclosure of school systems is now reversing the trend in bringing students back to schools** (see table 2 and interactive [map](#)).

