

ADJUSTING THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR

APRIL 2021

The calendars for the 2019–20 and 2020–21 academic years were heavily disrupted in most countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic, raising questions of how to approach the schedule for the current and upcoming school calendars to make up for lost learning and to support student well-being. Potential options for generating more instructional time include extending the school day, week, or year. Alternatively, countries may want to consider an intersessional calendar, which creates space to recover instructional time should future shutdowns be required.



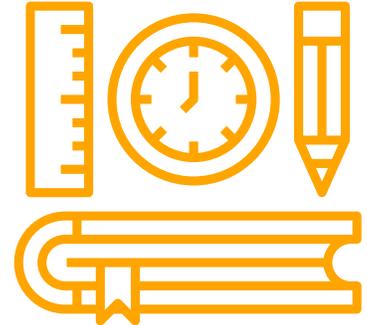
Reasons to Consider Adjusting the Academic Calendar

Pandemic-driven school closures disrupted the traditional academic calendar and reduced instructional time in many countries, even in cases where remote learning opportunities were provided. To proactively address learning loss that may have occurred, adjusting the academic calendar can facilitate recovery from learning loss and support student well-being, as well as prepare for potential future disruptions. Unlike unplanned responses, countries now can use existing knowledge to create clear expectations for the upcoming years. Although the evidence is not yet conclusive regarding best practices for academic calendar changes during COVID-19, this note presents some examples from pre-pandemic experiences as well as decisions that have been made by some countries over the past year.

Potential Country Responses¹

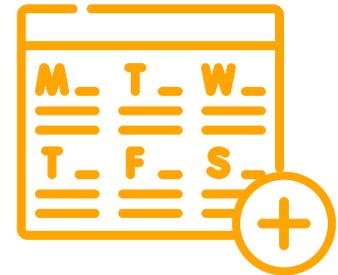
Extend the School Day

Pre-pandemic literature suggests that extending the school day (also known as extended/expanded learning time) could help recover some learning loss (Patall, Cooper, and Allen 2010; Holland, Alfaro, and Evans 2015; Pan and Sass 2020).² Some evidence suggests that extending the school day could be more effective than interventions that lengthen the school year (Wu 2020). At the time of this writing, the [United Kingdom was considering plans](#) to extend the school day as part of a package of measures to make up for COVID-19 closures and help students catch up on lost learning. Depending on the local context, staffing for this additional time can include the school's regular teachers, substitute teachers, or volunteers.



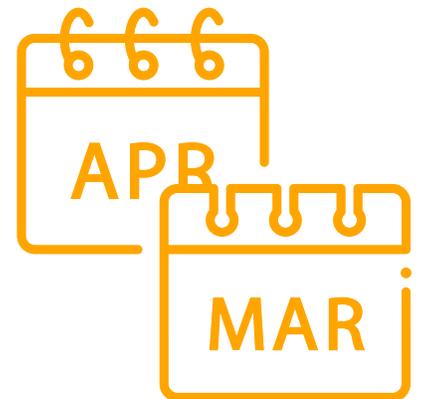
Extend the School Week

A six-day school week is another option for recovering lost instructional time. Before the pandemic, "Saturday school" was a fairly common remedial intervention, but now some countries, including Tanzania, are sending all students to school on Saturdays (Omondi 2020). In the West Bank, schools are still meeting in a hybrid format, but students participate in some form of schooling six days a week (UNRWA 2020).



Extend the School Year

Countries looking to add instructional time may also want to consider lengthening the academic year. Pre-pandemic literature on extending the school year suggests that the benefits of this strategy are likely to be small, but they may be more effective in combination with other remedial strategies (Patall, Cooper, and Allen 2010; Pan and Sass 2020). Morocco chose to use this strategy last year, postponing the school holidays to lengthen the academic year (Association for the Development of Education in Africa 2020). Extending the school year could also include an earlier start date, longer seasonal (winter/spring) breaks, and a later end date. School days would be spread over a longer period, so they reach into the summer, minimizing summer learning loss for all students. Other options for extending the school year include switching to year-round schooling, which is a longer-term intervention, or implementing summer school programs, which are covered in the note on remedial learning.



1. Calendar realignment decisions will have implications for key elements of the educational system that warrant special attention, including but not limited to teachers' working conditions, seasonal adjustments for regions in agricultural or weather-afflicted periods, school transportation, and parental work schedules.

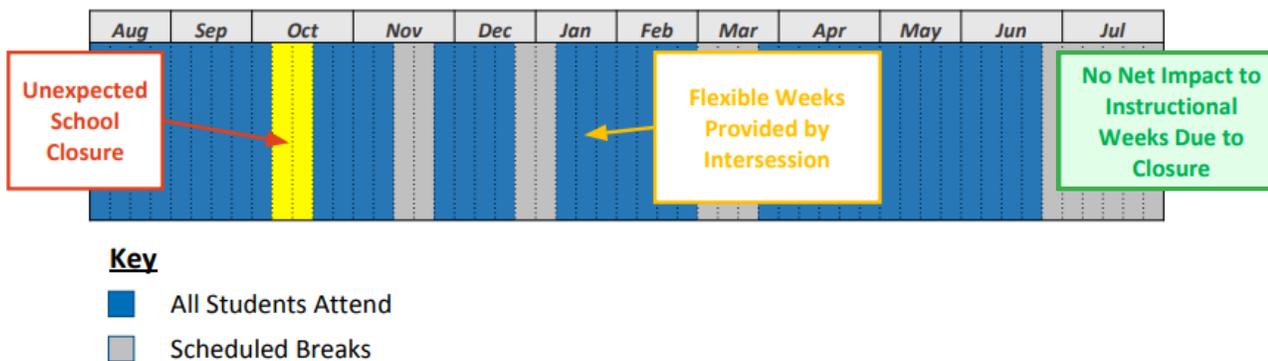
2. The appropriateness of this intervention will depend to some extent on the status of COVID-19 transmission in the community. In places where the disease is still spreading rapidly, countries such as Nigeria have opted to shorten in-person school days to limit disease transmission (Ejiofor 2020).

Plan Intersessions throughout the School Year

Intersessions are preidentified blocks of time that can be used flexibly throughout the year as needs emerge. They provide the option to allocate extra days or weeks for makeup time in the event of pandemic-related closures. This option is primarily focused on creating flexibility for future shutdowns, should they be necessary, by interweaving short breaks, or intersessions, throughout the school year. An alternate strategy recommended by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in the United States is to lengthen currently existing holiday breaks by several weeks each, creating three longer breaks (TEA n.d.). In either case, a shutdown would lead to using one or more of the remaining intersessions as regular instruction time. If schools do not have to shut down, intersessions can be used for teacher planning or for targeted remediation. Figure 1 provides an example of an intersessional calendar.



Figure 1. Example of intersessional calendar (excerpt from TEA)



Useful Resources



- [Evidence on the impact of extended-learning-time programs](#)

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