

(RE)BUILD BACK BETTER

10 recommendations
to make
'Schools Children Ready'
during and after
the pandemic



THOUGHT PARTNERS





1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the second wave of Covid-19 prolonging school closure in India indefinitely, both Central and state governments are reviewing teaching-learning practices to explore ways in which they can be adapted to a future of uncertainty.



Children, especially those in Grades 1-8, have been out of school for over 15 months and it is unlikely they will return to school in the current academic year (AY 2021-22)

As the next two years are expected to entail intermittent school closures due to multiple resurgent waves of Covid-19, there is growing consensus that the education system must develop the capacity to bridge resultant interruptions so as to minimize their negative impact on student learning. Children, especially those in Grades 1-8, have been out of school for over 15 months and it is unlikely they will return to school in the current academic year (AY 2021-22). It is important to note that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted children in primary grades, as they are dependent on parents or siblings for access to digital learning and were last on the priority list to return to school when they were briefly operational early this year. It is, thus, critical to think about ways to ensure continued learning for these children in particular.

Given this context, CSF has collaborated with leading organizations working in the education sector to conceptualize effective strategies as we move forward and reopen schools safely. The group agreed that most digital home-learning solutions implemented in AY 2020-21 were intended to maintain some level of continuity in education rather than to shift learning outcomes. While many solutions managed to deliver learning gains in small geographies or pilots, most of the interventions could not be scaled to more than 40% of the total student population¹. Offline solutions, such as community/ mohalla classes and physical worksheets, seemed more effective than online solutions, which had limited reach and engagement. Additionally, the need to support students' socio-emotional well-being has emerged distinctly, given the trauma they and their families have experienced due to issues, such as Covid-19 illness and deaths, migration, lack of social interaction, fear of the disease, and physical and mental abuse at home².

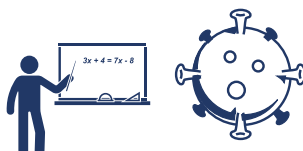
The group converged on three major challenges to resolve on a priority basis, as we work towards re-imagining education:

1



Learning loss due to missed and forgotten learning during school closures

2



Threat of continued disruptions even when schools reopen

3



Increased inequity in access to education

The key recommendations that emerged from the group, for all education stakeholders – the government system and NGOs – to together work on, are as follows:

1

Ensure equitable access to school: Reduce school dropouts and ensure demand for education is not lowered, by designing targeted interventions, especially for marginalized groups of children who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic

2

Rebuild for safety and increase instruction time: Upgrade school infrastructure to abide by COVID- 19 safety protocols and increase effective, in-person instructional time by reducing the number of holidays and freeing up teachers' time from administrative tasks

3

Slowly ease children back into school through readiness programs: Institutionalize school readiness programs for all children to gently re-induct them into social interactions while addressing their socio-emotional needs

4

Focus on foundational learning: Prioritize attainment of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills for all children before they start learning other subjects

5

Restructure what children are learning and how they are learning: Reduce the core curriculum to a minimal, viable set of learning outcomes and spread it over multiple years to ensure every cohort of students gets at least two to three years to compensate for missed and forgotten learning instead of a mere two to three months' remediation period

6

Identify where children are and meet them at their level: Leverage regular low-stakes assessments as a tool to identify the exact learning needs of each child and design teaching to meet them at their level

7

Redefine the role of teachers and teacher mentors: Ensure teachers are re-oriented to their new role of supporting parents and volunteers to enable learning in addition to conducting classroom teaching. Teacher mentors need to be equally empowered to support teachers in transitioning into their new roles successfully

8

Partner with parents as enablers of learning at home: Orient parents and support them in their new role as enablers of home learning

9

Identify and mobilize community volunteers: In order to reach every child, learning needs to be decentralized and taken to the communities by identifying and building local capacities to ensure learning continues despite disruptions

10

Decentralize decision making: Empower district and block officials to take localized and responsive decisions on school structures, instructional calendar, and opening and closing schools, to counter the impact of varying regional disruptions

2. CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

The World Bank³ estimates that the current pandemic has increased learning poverty in low and middle-income countries by 10%. This means 63% of children in the developing world cannot read or understand a simple text by Age 10, as opposed to 53% in pre-pandemic days. This estimate is corroborated by a study conducted by the Azim Premji University¹ which states that Covid-19 induced lockdowns in India have led to an average of 92% of students losing at least one specific language ability and 82% of students losing at least one specific mathematical ability from their previous classes across years. With the pandemic turning deadlier with each wave and the unavailability of vaccination for younger children, there is little possibility of schools reopening this year. The dire effect of school closures is compounded by the limited effectiveness that home learning interventions in India have shown in providing children with access to quality learning at scale, as more than 60% of children are unable to access online learning opportunities², this percentage being higher in rural areas.



**More than 60% of children
are unable to access online
learning opportunities**

**More than 6% of India's children
are unlikely to return to school
after the pandemic**

Even before the pandemic, almost 50 million primary grade children in India were not attaining foundational literacy or numeracy skills⁴. From 2005, Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reports have reported on the persistently low levels of foundational literacy and numeracy. The pandemic has exacerbated this learning loss with a projected loss of 1.5 years of learning by Grade 10 for students whose learning was reduced by half in Grade 3 due to Covid-19 shocks⁵. Unfortunately, such disruptions and learning losses are expected to continue even after schools reopen, as epidemiologists predict the recurrence of COVID-19 waves until a considerable segment of the population becomes immune.

A recent study by the Centre for Global Development suggests that more than 6% of all children in India are unlikely to return to school after the pandemic⁶. The trend predicts a high rate of dropout at the end of primary and secondary schooling with a clear gender differential in dropout rates. In addition, frequent absenteeism, low enrollment, and lack of safe access to schools are other aggravating issues that threaten to undo much of the progress made in getting all children in India to enroll in school over the past decade.

A collective, well-planned approach is essential to remedy these acute damages and to rebuild the education system to withstand future shocks. In doing so, three major problem areas must be addressed on a priority basis:

1

**Learning loss due to missed
and forgotten learning during
school closures**

2

**A threat of continued
disruptions even when
schools reopen**

3

**Increased inequity in access
to education**

While it is essential to address all these problem areas, the recommendations in this policy brief will center upon the first two issues.

2.1 LEARNING LOSS DUE TO MISSED AND FORGOTTEN LEARNING DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES



In the last 15 months, students have lost roughly 30 months of learning

Having been out of school for almost 15 months, children are experiencing two types of learning losses — missed learning and forgotten learning. The projected learning loss is two times for every month of school closures, i.e., in the last 15 months, students have lost roughly 30 months of learning⁷.

When the pandemic broke out last year, several home learning initiatives were put into action by the Central and state governments to ensure continuity in learning. However, many of these initiatives were suboptimal in terms of outreach and engagement and failed to show reasonable improvement at scale.

This can be attributed to the following reasons:

- **Lockdowns were declared with little warning, leaving no time to prepare for school closures.** The education system, especially the government school system, was not equipped to provide remote learning, since learning in these institutions has largely been school-based and teacher-led.
- **Along with a glaring digital divide, there is a dearth of quality digital content suitable for the home learning needs of children.** In many cases, it was observed that physical classroom content was being repurposed to meet the demands of online sessions^[1].
- **Learning activities in the Indian education system have been largely school-based and teacher-led.** In the past, very few state systems have actively sought or supported ongoing parental involvement or community support (via volunteers). Hence, it is not surprising that adequate resources to meet the demands of a holistic home learning experience, such as workbooks, teaching and learning materials, digital devices and reading books, were missing due to budgetary constraints or other execution challenges.
- **While there has been increasing focus on equipping parents to be facilitators of learning, low literacy rates among parents, coupled with their lack of agency, have resulted in very low parental engagement.** Many parents were forced to work multiple jobs to overcome the economic hardships imposed by the pandemic, resulting in a lack of time and motivation to support their children's education. Volunteer-based community learning models saw some success in various small-scale pilots or NGO programs, meeting the individual needs of children in specific geographies. However, the process of identifying, training and incentivizing volunteers is hugely demanding in terms of manpower and resources, and these interventions have, therefore, been difficult to scale.

Many children have suffered cognitive setbacks due to restrictions on their movement and interaction. The pandemic forced children to spend excessive amounts of time at home, leaving them vulnerable to physical, verbal and sexual abuse. In the first week of the lockdown in March 2020, there was a 50% increase in the number of phone calls to the Childline India helpline⁷. The trauma of being at home, coupled with the fear of abuse and of the disease, has had a negative cognitive impact on several children, reducing their ability to learn.

The loss of learning in Grades 1 to 3 leads to the loss of many foundational skills that are critical to acquiring higher-order abilities related to reading, writing, and mathematics. This, combined with the disengagement from learning, peers, and schooling, may cause young children to be less prepared for the future and possibly drop out of school altogether.

2.2 THREAT OF CONTINUED DISRUPTIONS EVEN WHEN SCHOOLS REOPEN



It is critical to plan for safe and consistent access to learning for children in India

With the possibility of multiple Covid-19 waves over the next two years, it is critical to plan for safe and consistent access to learning for children in India.

We foresee various kinds of schooling disruptions. As children return to school, in-person instructional time in school may be truncated as children would have to be called to schools in batches/ based on weekly rosters to maintain Covid-19 safety protocols. Additionally, the probability of intermittent shutdowns is high — these could be regional, state-wide, or nation-wide — and will cause breaks in learning unless learning is organized differently.

2.3 INCREASED INEQUITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION

As 97% of India's households see a drop in their income since last year, the economic impact of the pandemic has been devastating



Roughly 9 million children are at risk of being pushed into child labor globally

An estimated 10 million people in India lost their jobs during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic⁹. Unemployment increased by four percentage points from April 2021 to May 2021. As 97% of the households in India saw a decline in their income since last year, the economic impact of the pandemic has been devastating.

As a result of the economic downturn due to the pandemic, roughly nine million children globally are at risk of being pushed into child labor¹⁰. This poses a serious threat to children returning to school and will cause a lowered demand for education in low-income households as children are leveraged as additional earning hands for the families. In many cases, older children will be required to stay home for household chores and child care, as parents are at work or looking for work. In India, especially, the incidence of this phenomenon is likely to be greater in the case of middle school-age girls.

With lowered family incomes, several of the 79 million children enrolled in affordable private schools are migrating to free government schools.¹¹ This is reflected in the 2020 ASER report¹², which shows how government school enrollment had gone up by almost 3-4% from 2018-2020 for both boys and girls. While most affordable private schools already lack the means to support online engagement with students, the loss of students further limits their revenues and their ability to facilitate continued learning, possibly causing further dropouts or chronic absenteeism.

The above issues of access and lowered demand are exacerbated by factors of social and economic status, caste, gender, and disability status¹². Populations with existing disadvantages or vulnerabilities will be disproportionately affected, hence, leading to increased inequality in accessing education in our country.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

1.6 million girls aged 11 to 14 years in India currently out of school, the pandemic could impact girls further



Equitable access to schools as they reopen physically + incentives to enroll and stay in school

Nearly 24 million children¹³ globally are estimated to drop out of school due to the pandemic in addition to the nine million already at risk of being pushed into child labor. With the threat of child marriages, early pregnancy, and child trafficking looming large in India, the impact of the pandemic on education is being disproportionately felt by marginalized groups. Efforts to bring all children back to school as they reopen must include a targeted focus on at-risk populations. District- and block-level officials can be tasked with identifying these groups and designing interventions and engagement strategies to incentivize their return. This task must be performed right down to the local catchment areas of schools,

to identify those habitations within villages/ communities whose populations were already disadvantaged before the pandemic and are likely to be worse off now. Steps must be taken to build trust with these populations well in advance of schools reopening, to encourage the return of their children to school. With 1.6 million girls aged 11 to 14 years in India currently out of school, the pandemic could impact girls further. Therefore, in addition to bringing adolescent girls back to school, it is necessary to target the enrolment of girls in primary school. School-based efforts that place older girls in positions of responsibility in helping younger children return to school can be one way to highlight the significant role older girls can play in the proper functioning of schools and in furthering education for all.

3.2 REBUILD FOR SAFETY AND INCREASE INSTRUCTION TIME

Children have lost roughly twice the amount of learning for every month of school closure



Rebuild for safety and increase effective instruction time and devote 2-3 hours daily for FLN instruction

As schools reopen in a staggered manner, children will be expected to attend school for shorter periods of time in batches. While ensuring the infrastructure is upgraded to follow COVID-19 safety protocols of social distancing and hygiene, schools must also focus on increasing the effective in-person instruction time to make up for lost learning over the past year.

As evidenced by the UNESCO study, children have lost roughly twice the amount of learning for every month of school closure⁷. This makes a strong case for enhancing instructional time once schools reopen, to ensure children are able to bridge the learning gap.

While the RTE prescribes 220 days of instructional time for primary grades, the actual teaching time in classrooms is much lower due to the added burden of non-teaching administrative work¹⁴. A 2015-16 study revealed that out of the 220 teaching days mandated by RTE, teachers spend only 19.1% of their time teaching¹⁵.

- **Ensure 2.5-3 hours of FLN through mandatory orders for Grades 1-3:** It is important to devote at least 2.5-3 hours of daily instructional time toward building foundational literacy and numeracy to ensure children are able to build proficiency in foundation skills that will help them acquire complex abilities in the future.
- **Shorten summer/ winter vacations:** The government must reduce the number of vacation days over the coming years to make up for lost learning in the past two years.
- **Reduce teacher's administrative burden:** It is necessary to reduce the burden of administrative work on teachers in order to reduce non-teaching time and increase effective instructional time. Using tech-based platforms to capture all forms of student data can be one way to reduce the time teachers spend collecting data in registers and increase their effective instructional time.

3.3 SLOWLY EASE CHILDREN BACK INTO SCHOOL THROUGH READINESS PROGRAMS

Activity-based readiness program is a key to enabling a smooth transition to mainstream schooling for each child



Ease children back into school gently, through readiness programs that focus on socio-emotional development

Most children have not stepped into schools for over a year and as we work towards reopening schools, it is essential to devise a school readiness program to help children transition safely into a social environment. An activity-based readiness program is a key to enabling a smooth transition to mainstream schooling for each child, and also to help teachers identify the child's cognitive learning level and socio-emotional state. A school readiness program is the need of the hour not just for children entering foundational grades but for children across all grades to acquire or regain fundamental capabilities and build essential habits.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), defines Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as “how children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” Since the pandemic has deprived children of social interactions and relationships, it is imperative that the school readiness program focuses on SEL skills to ensure children are primed into socialized schooling.

Additionally, socio-emotional learning should continue to be an integral part of the curriculum to help students overcome the impact of the trauma induced by likely future disruptions and help children enhance their cognitive learning capabilities. According to CASEL, SEL implementation can improve academic performance by 11 percentile points. The positive impacts of SEL last long after schooling — for about 18 years after programs are implemented⁸.

3.4 FOCUS ON FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY (FLN)

It is essential to focus on achieving foundational reading, writing, and mathematical skills for all children as they return to school for the first few months

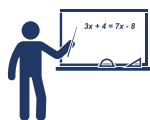


Focus on FLN before focusing on teaching other subjects for all children

Given the widely accepted projections of learning loss due to the pandemic, it is essential to focus on achieving foundational reading, writing, and mathematical skills for all children as they return to school for the first few months, before they start studying other subjects. With the launch of the NIPUN Bharat mission, a razor-sharp focus on foundational learning is vital to get all children in Grade 3 to read and do basic Math by 2025.

3.5 RESTRUCTURE THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

A brief 3-6 months' bridge program will be insufficient to serve the purpose of mitigating learning losses incurred over two years



Redesign the curriculum and spread it over multiple years

In order to bridge learning gaps, build solid foundation for learning and ensure that continuous disruptions do not impact learning. It is necessary to revisit what needs to be taught and how it is taught.

3.5.1 What needs to be taught?

As children return to school after two years, they cannot be expected to learn the same way as they did and catch up on missed learning for AY 2020-21 and AY 2021-22 within the span of a single year. The following are a few recommendations on how to restructure the curriculum:

- **Prioritize learning outcomes:** The curriculum needs to be restructured to meet the age-appropriate learning needs of children with a minimum viable set of prioritized learning outcomes.
- **Focus on bridging and revision of previous grades:** Bridging and revising previous grades' learning must be in-built into the yearly curriculum. These measures will ensure that children are taught and helped to retain, within the limited time, key competencies to meet appropriate grade-level expectations.
- **Spread curriculum learning for affected cohorts over multiple years:** A brief three to six months' bridge program will be insufficient for mitigating learning losses incurred over two years. Therefore, along with a prioritized curriculum, it is important to spread the curriculum over multiple years. This

will ensure that children are able to attain appropriate learning proficiency over the next two to three years, rather than being rushed to do so in just one year. We recommend that states develop a three to four-year perspective plan for bridging curricular gaps and bringing children ‘at grade’ by the end of the third year.

Cohort (as per 2022-23)	Academic Year	AY 20-21	AY 21-22	AY 22-23			AY 23-24			AY 24-25
Grade 1 cohort	Actual grade	-	-	Grade 1			Grade 2			Grade 3
	Skills of grade			Grade 1			Grade 2			Grade 3
	Key outcomes	-	-	Grade 1 skills			Grade 2 skills			Grade 3 skills
Grade 2 cohort	Actual grade	-	Grade 1	Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4
	Skills of grade			Grade 1	Grade 2		Grade 2	Grade 3		Grade 4
	Key outcomes	-	No effective learning	Accelerated grade 1 + mid grade 2 skills			Revision, accelerated grade 2 + grade 3 skills			Revision of grade 3 + grade 4 skills
Grade 3 cohort	Actual grade	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3			Grade 4			Grade 5
	Skills of grade			Grade 1	Grade 1 & 2	Grade 2	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 3 & 4	Grade 4 & 5
	Key outcomes	No instruction	No effective learning	Higher accelerated grade 1 + mid grade 2 skills			Revision, accelerated integrated grade 2 and 3 and early grade 4 skills			Revision of grade 3 + key skills of grade 4+ grade 5 skills

Fig 1. An example of a cohort-based multi-year literacy curriculum designed by Language and Learning Foundation
NOTE: It has been assumed that the schools will reopen next year and there is no significant learning happening this year

3.5.2 How should it be taught?



3.5.2.1 Build modularity in the curriculum: To counter the impact of continuous disruptions, the curriculum should be modular in nature so that there is flexibility to modify and remediate as per the changing learning needs of children during and after disruptions. Ensuring teachers have access to daily lesson plans, which are closely linked to home learning and remediation activities, will ensure teachers know what exactly is to be taught and how it is to be practiced at home to enhance retention.



3.5.2.2 Make home and community learning integral to the teaching-learning process (with or without disruptions) as the school—home learning model:

As schools reopen, it is crucial to ensure that home and community learnings continue alongside the regular school week to enable an easy switch in case of disruptions to schooling. Additionally, a blended learning model of instructional time split between home and school can ensure that what is learned at school is practiced at home, and learning is retained.

3.6 IDENTIFY WHERE CHILDREN ARE AND MEET THEM AT THEIR LEVEL

Assessments need to be an integral part of the curriculum structure design to ensure teachers are continuously aware of where children are and are able to meet them at their level



Constantly assess children and inform instruction accordingly

When schools reopen, children in the same grade are expected to return to school at different learning levels depending on the amount of access and engagement they have had with home learning and their own learning capabilities. In order to cater to the needs of this type of multi-level classrooms, as is foreseen, it is important for the teachers to identify and teach every child at the right level. Assessments need to be an integral part of the curriculum structure design to ensure teachers are continuously aware of where children are and are able to meet them at their level. Simple assessments that can be used by teachers for organizing groups and guiding instruction are needed.

3.6.1 Conduct periodic dipsticks by the system at block/district levels

Pre, ongoing and post-lesson assessments coupled with regular dipstick assessments need to be incorporated into the instructional design. Regular diagnostic assessments at the block or district level can be undertaken to evaluate progress on learning outcomes.



Leveraging simple phone and SMS-based assessments, WhatsApp quizzes, and mobile phone applications for assessing students can help teachers identify how much children have practiced and retained while learning at home

3.6.2 Strengthen teacher-led assessments for both classrooms as well as home learning scenarios

While we saw a lot of focus on monitoring students' access and engagement in home learning over the past year, it has been difficult to assess learning in a distance scenario with little or no face-to-face interaction between students and teachers. Leveraging simple phone and SMS-based assessments, WhatsApp quizzes, and mobile phone applications for assessing students can help teachers identify how much children have practiced and retained while learning at home. That said, it remains a challenge to assess learning levels when children cannot read, as pen-paper assessments or technology-based applications in such cases will not yield relevant information to help a teacher organize instruction according to the child's learning level. In the case of relaxed lockdowns, in-person assessments may be conducted by volunteers using worksheets to identify how much students have learned over time. It is important to ensure children are assessed, whether formally or informally, immediately upon their return to school after each disruption so that teachers can organize classroom instruction to meet each child at his/her learning level.

3.7 REDEFINE THE ROLES OF TEACHERS AND TEACHER MENTORS

Training should be blended and based on experiential learning — the online sessions should be participative



Enhance capacity for facilitating learning in school and at home, and for providing psycho social support to children

With the changing modalities of teaching—learning processes, the role of teachers and teacher mentors needs to be redefined. A teacher's role has evolved from being a facilitator in the classroom to additionally supporting learning facilitation for students at home.



Training should be blended and based on experiential learning — the online sessions should be participative

3.7.1 Build capacity of teachers for digital, home learning, and socio-emotional learning

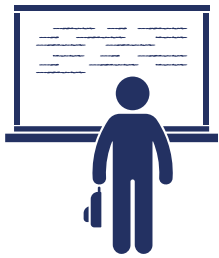
It is imperative to train teachers on digital learning as well as on equipping parents and volunteers to support children in learning at home. Teachers also need to be skilled in how to facilitate instructions to support the socio-emotional needs of children that have arisen in the course of the pandemic. Training should be blended and based on experiential learning — the online sessions should be participative, after which participants can be given individual/ group assignments as a follow-up activity.



Visually appealing, structured teacher guides comprising daily lesson plans, tagged with targeted home learning and remediation activities that are aligned with learning objectives, can serve as a beneficial add-on to pre- and in-service teacher training

3.7.2 Provide clear and simple teacher guidance for school—home learning

Teacher support can be enhanced by providing explicit guidance on what to teach every day and how to support children's learning at home when disruptions to schooling occur. Clear, simple, and visually appealing, structured teacher guides comprising daily lesson plans, tagged with targeted home learning and remediation activities that are aligned with learning objectives, can serve as a beneficial add-on to pre- and in-service teacher training. In the case of school closure, a simple 'rule' can be followed, each teacher can have a phone call with each child/ family once a week. A lot can be achieved from continued contact over a period of time.



Mentors can be equipped with tools, such as monitoring apps and observation checklists to conduct spot testing in order to evaluate progress on children's learning and identify areas of improvement for teacher capacity building

3.7.3 Build capacity of teacher mentors (BRCs/CRCs) for supporting teachers in the school—home learning model

Teacher mentors (BRCs/CRCs) need to be upskilled in supporting teachers in the classroom through online (video and phone calls) and offline (physical visits to *mohalla* classes/ classrooms in school) mentoring on a regular basis, along with regular nudges and appreciation over calls/ text to keep them motivated to support teachers and children. Mentors can be equipped with tools such as monitoring apps and observation checklists to conduct spot testing to evaluate progress on children's learning and identify areas of improvement for teacher capacity building. In addition to helping teachers become better facilitators of learning, the teacher mentors should be equipped to support teacher well-being by providing them with psycho-social support through workshops, audio-video learning content, and one-on-one check-ins with experts.

3.8 PARTNER WITH PARENTS AS ENABLERS OF LEARNING AT HOME

Increasing parental engagement in education will help bridge the learning gap, and ensure students are supported at home in case of future learning disruptions



Partner with parents as enablers of learning at home by equipping them with resources and giving them step-by-step guidance

This pandemic has illuminated the role parents can play in their children's education. Increasing parental engagement in education will not only help bridge the learning gap by increasing effective instructional time at home but also ensure students are supported at home in case of future learning disruptions.

3.8.1 Equip parents with clear and simple guidance

Parents, especially those with little or no education, must be equipped to facilitate learning at home through clear instructions and guides for learning activities. Additionally, they must be informed on positive parenting and managing their children's behavior at home, as these are common challenges faced by parents of young children deprived of the social interaction afforded by a school environment. Forming small support groups of parents, inviting parents to school once a week, demonstrating feasible activities

and orienting parents to conducting them at home, and reviewing the experiences of the previous week can contribute immensely towards building parents' capabilities as well as their engagement and cooperation with teachers.

3.8.2 Teachers and parents working in tandem with each other

Teachers and parents need to work in partnership to set learning goals for children, to ensure there is equal accountability for student achievement. Parents must be equipped to track student progress and growth, sustain their motivation, and help them see that their efforts are yielding results.

3.9 IDENTIFY AND MOBILIZE COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

“It takes a village to raise a child” – this statement has never been more relevant.



Identify, train, and equip community volunteers with tools to facilitate learning in the community

Facilitating a holistic home-learning experience requires not only parent-teacher cooperation but also decentralized and individualized support through community volunteers in order to reach every single child. Community volunteers can cater to the needs of children in smaller groups, especially in elementary grades, and can thus support teachers in ensuring learning never stops even when disruptions occur or localized restrictions on school functioning are put in place.

3.9.1 Leverage existing volunteers in the system

Existing community workers such as NGO staff and volunteers, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) workers, members of the National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC), BEd and DEd students, etc., and even local school alumni, can be enlisted to form a common pool of volunteers at the district-level under the charge of a Community Engagement Officer. This will help create capacity on the ground while leveraging existing system resources.

3.9.2 Equip volunteers with the right tools

Volunteers need to be on-boarded and upskilled in supporting teachers and parents in ensuring learning for all children. Along with training, volunteers need to be equipped with tools, such as volunteer handbooks and templates consisting of simple modular activities that are known to be effective and easy to follow, to help them in their role as learning facilitators.

3.9.3 Incentivize volunteers for sustained momentum

Incentivizing volunteers for sustained engagement through mobile recharges, rewards, recognitions, and other non-monetary benefits can ensure consistency in operations.

3.10 DECENTRALIZE DECISION MAKING

Different regions may experience resurgent waves of Covid-19 to varying degrees and at different times. It follows from this that decision making will need to be appropriately decentralized



Appoint senior officials as district nodal officers to expedite decision making based on local contexts and prevailing conditions

Given the way the pandemic has progressed, it is easy to see that different regions will experience resurgent waves of Covid-19 to varying degrees and at different times. It follows from this that decision making will need to be appropriately decentralized.

3.10.1 Decentralize localized aspects of decision making to districts

Empowering district officials to make decisions on school opening and closure, managing school instructional days, reducing administrative tasks, and adapting instruction design will help ensure actions taken are responsive to local conditions and requirements. This also furthers the case for having a flexible and modular curriculum that can be easily adapted to the context of each district without compromising the quality of learning. Regular assessments to gauge the extent of learning are key to ensuring progress as well as informing district-wise strategy.

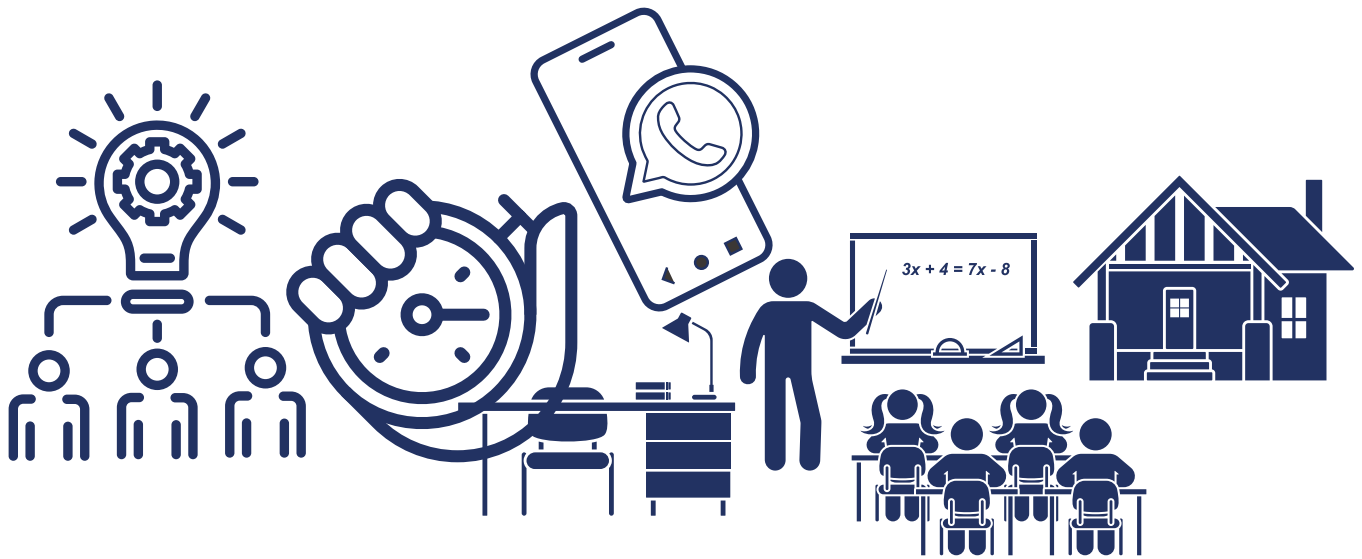
3.10.2 Designate an IAS or State Civil Services officer as a nodal officer for each district

An existing officer at the district level (ADM, SDM, OSD, etc.) can be designated as a nodal officer to lead the effort, conduct periodic reviews of the situation, and respond with quick actions in close collaboration with Education Department officials.

3.10.3 Identify innovative channels of local financing to address the digital divide

Innovative sources of funding from the private sector can be identified and channelized to procure and distribute devices to children, as well as for local printing and distribution of teaching and learning materials to children at home.

4. CONCLUSION



Developing systemic resilience to withstand the impact of any future disruptions to school learning

As we work towards (re)building our education system, it is critical to reassess how we educate our children and place emphasis on developing systemic resilience to withstand the impact of any future disruptions to school learning. The future of education appears to lie in ‘phygital’ learning that blends technology with human intervention at home, alongside in-person classroom learning, whenever possible. Innovations that champion learning and retention for all children while allowing flexibility and fostering continuity will be most sustainable as we **Build Back Better**.

REFERENCES/ END-NOTES

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