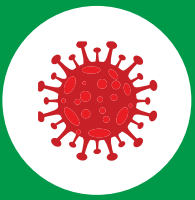


Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on K-12 Schools

A Position Paper by FICCI ARISE



CONTEXT

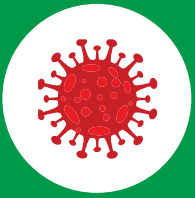
Educators, administrators, training organisations, service providers, parents and students around the world are feeling the extraordinary ripple effect of the crisis as educational institutions and training centres are shut down amid the public health emergency. In a matter of weeks the spread of virus has changed how students and youth are educated and trained around the world. Those changes have given us a glimpse of how education could change in the long term. Schools around the country have been impacted by Covid-19, facing closures. With ICT infrastructure not being uniformly pervasive in India across regions and types of schools, only a small percentage of schools are equipped to provide full access to online education. Several independent schools have embarked on technological platforms to deliver online learning programs to the students and have made significant investments. These schools are in fact incurring increased costs to ensure that student learning continues. From the not so well resourced schools also, we have witnessed innovative approaches for continuous engagement, using phones and television as a media.

On the demand side, ILO report says that coronavirus pandemic could trigger a global economic crisis and destroy up to 195 million jobs around the world if governments do not act fast to shield workers from the impact. Till few months back we were discussing about impact of Industry 4.0 on employment, but over the past weeks the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges to all types and levels of learning, including schooling, TVET, apprenticeships and skills development. Due to this crisis not only is the health of millions of people at risk but the world of work is being profoundly affected and also at stake are their long-term livelihoods and wellbeing.

It is important here to highlight that many families with increased professional and household responsibilities have been experiencing emotional and mental pressures due to the lockdown situation. Children, too, are used to their safe spaces, places where they can go out and interact with others their age, something that has not been happening since the lockdown began. They are learning to cope with the changed realities, however, lack of social support during the lockdown period will only aggravate the stress in children.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, caregivers and educators have responded in stride, and have been instrumental in finding new ways to keep children learning by developing online and offline learning materials, including for physical exercise, to help improve children's physical strength, health and mental wellbeing during the school closures.

The education fraternity has been at the forefront to ensure that the learning process of its students is in continuum and there are no obstructions even during the testing pandemic times. School mentor's and Management's have been providing constant support to the faculty / staff by creating opportunities for capacity building to get more familiarised with the new tools being used so that they are able to effectively engage students.



CONTINUITY OF TEACHING-LEARNING

In a matter of a few weeks, the education sector has witnessed huge changes in the way teaching-learning is being transacted across the world, indicating that the future of education has arrived sooner than expected! Schools have embarked on technological platforms to deliver online learning programs to the students and have made significant investments. Teachers are doubling up as content curators and parents are stepping in as proctors, keeping up with lesson plans. Educators across the world are experiencing new possibilities to do things innovatively and with greater flexibility that are resulting in potential advantages in increasing accessibility to education for students across the world. These are new modes of instruction that have previously been largely untapped particularly in the realm of school education. In this crucial time, even parents have been supportive and equally involved in their children's education, which has smoothed this transition from real to virtual, and so has the faculty.

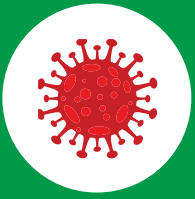
School's Adaptation to ensure that student learning goes on has been covered under the following 5 blocks:

Preparing for effective teaching with technology	Schools are running contextualised teacher training programs to ensure all teachers are digitally literate and are able to integrate their lesson plans/content with technology
Planning and Procuring right tools for Schools	Due to sudden transition to online, schools are making investments in computers, broadband, learning tools, software, online libraries, etc.
Communication with Parents	Schools are ensuring that parents are informed about ongoing efforts and they are also reciprocating by actively being involved in the entire process of delivering online classes
Teachers as Corona Warriors	Faculty and teachers are spending much more time than usual to plan, learn, adapt and deliver online classes. Amidst increased household and family chores during the lock down, they have risen to the call of duty
Academic Calendar	Schools are equipping themselves for the current situation by reworking the academic and non-academic schedules to be able to provide a seamless transition for children and achieve full course time to students



Potential opportunities emerging from the current crisis

- **Multiple schooling formats:** Move away from rigid campus and attendance based system and promote:
 - Blended Schooling – blend of in school face to face and on-line
 - Home Schooling
- **Imbibing Self-Learning traits among students:** Shift the focus from guided coaching and tutoring to developing self-learning traits in students
- **Learn from Home Days:** Delivering positive outcomes in several sectors, virtual engagement is going to become a way of life in the future. In order to train today's students to seamlessly adapt to this virtual world, for middle and secondary school students, designate few days in every academic year as 'Learn from Home' days and run on-line classes.
- **Decentralize Assessments:** Move away from the 'all important' end of program examination
 - Have a set of 'summative assessments' in various subjects that could be 'Internally Assessed' and 'Externally Moderated'
 - Have a set of 'Project Based Unit' in various subjects that could be 'Internally Assessed' and 'Externally Moderated'
 - Provide for appropriate weightage for both the above in the final score of the student
 - Compile data around scores assigned internally and their moderation, if any – use this analytic for professional development
- **Assessment Rubric:** Publish detailed criterion based 'assessment rubrics' for various subjects and components that are easily comprehensible to students and teachers. Break the criteria into various components relevant to the subject such as research, investigation, analysis, understanding, comprehension, presentation etc
- **Virtual Assessments:** Introduce an option of on-screen assessments



CHALLENGES FACED DUE TO STATE ORDERS AND DIRECTIVES

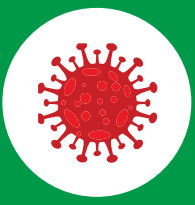
Schools on their own have been mindful of the economic challenges that certain parental households are undergoing due to the lock down and have been pro-active to provide relief to the extent feasible and sustainable. At the same time schools have been working overtime to ensure that they transcend to on-line learning and keep intact it's academic resources and staff community. In midst of all this several state governments have issued a number of directions in quick succession putting certain embargos on collection of fee. These populist and overlapping announcements have caused confusion and false hope among the parent community and have put the continuance of school operations at severe threat. Besides student fee, unaided private schools do not have any other source of revenue. As it is it is very challenging to attract bright people to the profession of teaching, if schools' functioning gets disrupted it would be very difficult to bring them back on track.

As per UDISE data there are over 3.03 lac unaided private schools in the country. At a very basic estimate of the direct employment these schools offer (both on school rolls as well as on contractors), unaided private schools employ over 3 crore people comprising teaching, non-teaching and support staff. This translates into livelihood to 12-15 crore citizens of the country.

There is a common myth that all schools carry reserves which would help them sustain. Fact remains that bulk of unaided private schools have come up in last two decades. Over the last fifteen years, un-aided private schools have risen by 73%. Such schools are still in the process of paying back the long term loans they had obtained to establish themselves. Breaking of fee collection cycle shall lead to NPA's to the tune of hundreds of crores in a sector that has otherwise been financially compliant largely.

Common directives issued by most State Governments are as follows

- 🦠 Monthly collection of fees during lockdown
- 🦠 Charge only tuition fee
- 🦠 No transportation charges
- 🦠 No fees increase
- 🦠 No salary cuts
- 🦠 Cannot strike off anyone's name on non-payment of fee



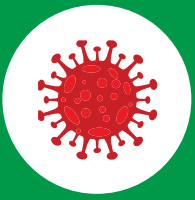
IMPACT OF VARIOUS GOVERNMENTAL ORDERS IN STATES

Description	Hardships	Impact	Suggestions
Waiver of transport fee during lockdown period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero revenue directed by the government • 70-80% fixed cost in transport • Schools have to continue to pay salaries to drivers/conductors/maids • There is no waiver of road tax or other statutory levies for this period • While 3M moratorium has been provided for EMI payments, it has come at a cost of interest over interest 	<p>VERY SERIOUS IMPACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are forced to absorb fixed costs pertaining to months of April-June with zero revenue • Employment of most vulnerable section of society has started getting affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If schools do not re-start physical operations w.e.f. 1st July, collection of at least 75% of transport fee should be allowed to enable schools continue to pay salaries to transport staff and maintain the fleet
Charging only 'Tuition Fee' component during lockdown period and deferring other fee components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools pay their salaries and establishment costs from the composite of various kind of fee they collect from students. Tuition fee alone does not make up for salaries of all staff. • Deferment in collection of fee components other than 'Tuition' has posed a severe cash flow challenge to schools • Most parents are construing 'deferment' as 'waiver' which is causing avoidable distrust and tussle between parents and schools • The challenge has magnified as the last cycle of fee collection for most schools was in January and funds collected at that time have been consumed 	<p>VERY SERIOUS IMPACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most unaided private schools have come up in last two decades. Several continue to have loan obligations. There are no reserves that these schools can lay their hands to. • Schools shall have to either raise temporary funding from banks, which is not easy and takes time, or will have to stagger payment of salaries to staff • This shall be very unfair on teachers who have really risen to the occasion as 'Corona Heroes' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee components other than 'Tuition' that have been deferred currently should be directed to be deposited latest by 30th June' 2020. • If schools do not re-start physical operations wef 1st July, collection of all fee components should be allowed. • Schools shall continue to offer education through on-line mode.
Monthly Fee payments instead of quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative challenge for schools to collect fees 	<p>NEUTRAL IMPACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt and EMI servicing of Schools has gotten impacted. • Partially mitigated due to 3M moratorium provided by banks • Has increased interest costs of schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly collection should be allowed wef 1st July' 2020

Description	Hardships	Impact	Suggestions
<p>Not insisting on fee payments if unable to pay;</p> <p>Not to strike off students name from roll upon non-payment of fee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This direction is open-ended with no defined date as to by when parents should finally pay the school fee • This has resulted in major abuse of this provision by several such households who can pay – they too are not paying • This is resulting in major defaults and bad debts for schools • Habitual Fee Defaulters have gotten a free run • Dues pertaining to period prior to lock down are also not being paid 	<p>VERY SERIOUS IMPACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are struggling to collect fee • Schools are struggling to maintain adequate cash flows to continue to pay salaries and maintain upkeep of school's infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dues pertaining to period prior to the lock down should be paid immediately • Latest date of 30th June' 2020 should be prescribed for payment of all school dues • On genuine case to case basis, schools may offer further instalments • Schools should be allowed to strike off the name of students on account of non-payment of fee by 30th of June or as per instalment plan, if any
<p>No Increase in fee for academic year 2020-2021</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools had already hired staff, committed on infrastructure, furniture, resources etc. 	<p>SERIOUS IMPACT</p> <p>However schools have risen to the call of the nation to absorb this loss</p>	

It is in best interest of students that schools are able to maintain their original character during these testing times. When students finally return, schools should be able to deliver same offerings to students what they were enjoying before the lock down. In order to ensure the same, schools have to necessarily maintain their staff and infrastructure. It is already very challenging to draw people to the profession of teaching, if there is a breakdown now, it would be very difficult to pull schools back together. Institutions take years to build and adverse orders in this temporary situation can put these institutions at permanent risk and jeopardize the future of the country. In order to enable schools to maintain the same as also to protect livelihood of 12 – 15 crore people who are equal citizens of the country, the government should refrain from issuing knee jerk directives to address populist and misguided activism being perpetuated by a handful of people. Breaking of fee collection cycle as has been announced by several states will break unaided private schools. The need of the hour is to protect schools and school community.

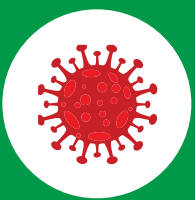
Case in point: A writ petition under article 32 of the constitution of India was filed with the honourable Supreme Court of India, requesting the court to give directions to states to direct colleges and other unaided private institutions to provide a relief, waive off, or give a moratorium on academic fees for the next semester and restrict them from asking lump sum amount. The Honourable Supreme Court on India, on the 8th May, 2020, dismissed the writ petition and stated, **“We are not inclined to entertain this petition filed under Article 32 of the Constitution of India.”** Hon’ble Supreme Court too disposed of a populist PIL in this regard. The apex court has held that unaided institutions only survive on fee revenue and collection of the same is necessary for them to remain operational.



RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS

Closing schools may bring some benefit in slowing the spread of the disease, but other measures will yield long term benefits. We know from previous studies that school closures are likely to have the greatest effect if the virus has low transmissibility and attack rates are higher in children. This is the opposite of COVID-19. On the contrary, closure has stacked the heavy costs to children's development, to their parents and to the economy. No amount of helicopter parenting or videoconferencing can replace real-life teachers, or the social skills acquired in the playground. Even in the countries best prepared for e-learning, such as South Korea, virtual school is less good than the real thing. In normal times school helps level the playing field. Without it, the achievement gap between affluent and working-class children will grow. The recent MHA guidelines has divided the country into green, orange and red zones and different level of activities were allowed in the districts depending on the zone that they were in. While recognizing the uncertainties inherent in discussing any timeline for returning to pre-outbreak normalcy, in this note also strives to lay out key considerations towards reopening educational institutions. In doing so, it focuses on two main questions:

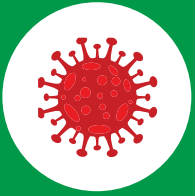
- When can the schools be re-opened and what approach could be followed to reach the decision?
- How can the school education stakeholders facilitate and get ready for school reopening with a primary focus on health and safety measures?



HOW TO PLAN RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS



Assess the pandemic situation in zones within zones: District wise classification of Green, Orange and Red zones should be further classified based on locality. Schools cater to a limited vicinity.



POSSIBLE MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED FOR RESUMPTION OF SCHOOLS IN JULY

Green Zones

Allow schools to open regularly

Orange Zones

Allow schools to open with greater restrictions

Red Zones

Continue the present mode of on-line classes

Physical Distancing

- Students to ensure at least one metre distance within a classroom
- Restrict access to places and activities that allow larger gatherings
- Discard biometric attendance
- Stagger the end of day departure of students by year group to avoid crowds gathering
- Stagger lunch times (preferably twice a day in shifts) by class to ensure physical distancing; add markings on ground to prevent crowding.
- Establish controlled entrances and exits (e.g. based on grade levels, students and teacher entry) and flows (e.g. one-way traffic in tight corridors)

- Create staggered schedule for students to attend school on different days (alternating days) or different parts of the day (morning/afternoon)
- Students to ensure at least one metre distance within a classroom
- Restrict access to places and activities that allow larger gatherings
- Discard biometric attendance
- Establish controlled entrances and exits (e.g. based on grade levels, students and teacher entry) and flows (e.g. one-way traffic in tight corridors)
- Stagger the end of day departure of students by year group to avoid crowds gathering.
- Stagger lunch times (preferably twice a day in shifts) by class to ensure physical distancing; add markings on ground to prevent crowding.
- Develop online assessment system for evaluations

No Activity

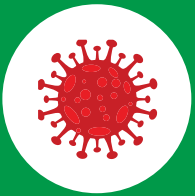


Health, Hygiene and Safety Protocols

- Check and log temperature before the students/teachers get into the bus and school
- Install hand-sanitizing stations at entrances, common areas in the school
- Clean and disinfect school buildings, classrooms periodically, particularly surfaces that are touched by many people
- Improve building conditions and airflow/ventilation
- Keep all doors open
- Isolation rooms need to be set up, located away from classrooms and activity areas and with observationspace and separate toilet facilities.
- If a student is placed in isolation, the medical staff will contact parents who will be required to pick up their child immediately
- All school buses have to be deep cleaned, disinfected and sterilized periodically
- Organise sensitization and training sessions for students, faculty and support staff
- Review attendance policy for students (ensuring students stay home in case of symptoms exhibited individually or for a family member)
- Limit visiting hours from external members (incl. parents)
- Notify health officials of suspected or confirmed positive cases. Set up protocols for contact tracing if cases are detected in school/ community
- Work with school health workers/social workers to identify and support students and staff who exhibit signs of distress.
- Keep bathroom lights on, no-touch trash cans
- Discontinue vending machines
- Recording everyone's green QR health codes on the colour-coded health system app
- No food/stationery sharing
- Cannot bring toys to school
- Create markings on floors, where needed to show pupils how far apart to stand
- Sanitise touch points such as door handles etc at least twice during school hours
- All sanitary workers overseeing the Toilets and doing sanitisation of classrooms and facilities should put on disposable surgical gloves at all times during their presence at the restrooms

No Activity

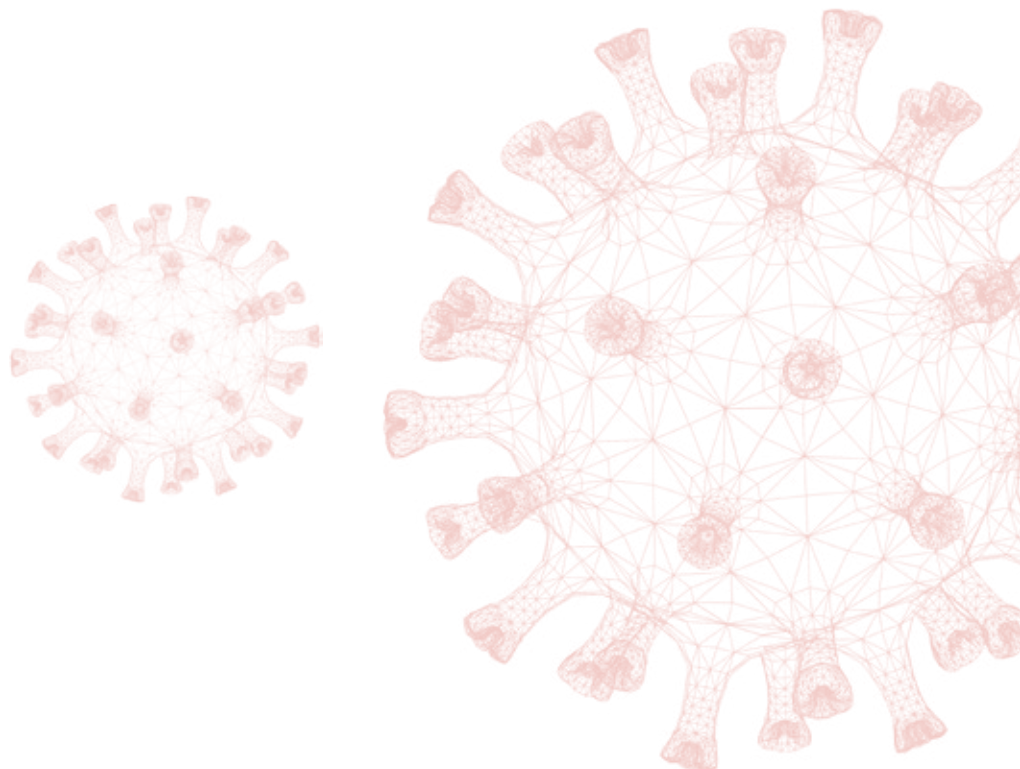




DIFFERENT SCENARIOS OF RE-OPENING SCHOOLS

Different permutations and combinations of the below possibilities to be considered for re-opening schools:

Scenarios	Rationale
Targeted Groups	Prioritise opening of schools for students in grades that have high stake exams (Classes X & XII)
Odd/Even	Requirement of physical attendance in school to be based on alternating roll numbers leading to 50% attendance each day. This shall reduce conglomeration by half
Limited working hours	Restrictive working hours (4 hours per day) to reduce student exposure
Operate in double shifts	In order to meet the challenge of limited space, operate in double shifts(8am-11pm/11-2pm)
Hybrid Model of learning	Online instruction and related assignments, both synchronous and asynchronous time to be viewed as instructional time





Established in 1927, FICCI is the largest and oldest apex business organisation in India. Its history is closely interwoven with India's struggle for independence, its industrialization, and its emergence as one of the most rapidly growing global economies. A non-government, not-for-profit organisation, FICCI is the voice of India's business and industry. From influencing policy to encouraging debate, engaging with policy makers and civil society, FICCI articulates the views and concerns of industry. It serves its members from the Indian private and public corporate sectors and multinational companies, drawing its strength from diverse regional chambers of commerce and industry across states, reaching out to over 2,50,000 companies. The chamber with its presence in 14 states and 10 countries, provides a platform for networking and consensus building within and across sectors and is the first port of call for Indian industry, policy makers and the international business community.

Address: FICCI, Federation House, Tansen Marg, New Delhi-110001



FICCI Alliance for Re-Imagining School Education (FICCI ARISE) is a collegium of members representing various facets of the education ecosystem who have come together to promote the need of quality education for all and the role independent schools can play in achieving this. The primary focus of the alliance is defining norms for standards and transparency, augmenting quality for 21st century readiness, policy advocacy and facilitating Capacity Building and access. The alliance advocates for a progressive policy environment that brings together public and independent schools to achieve Universal Quality Education in India. FICCI ARISE endeavours to unify the sectors' voice at States and National level. We have a national footprint through our National Committee and five Regional Committees. Our members and affiliates are education experts and represent leading schools, industry associations, consulting firms, think tanks, and foundations.

Federation House

1, Tansen Marg, New Delhi 110001, INDIA

✉ **ficciarise@ficci.com**

🌐 **www.ficciarise.org**

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