



School education

Response to COVID-19

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Executive summary

The challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted the school education system with an unusual set of circumstances. As the threat from the pandemic grew, schools across the country were summarily closed in March 2020 in order to avert the spread of the virus. While school closures were announced as an interim measure, extended closure could cause a significant disruption in the ecosystem, impacting an **estimated 253 million students in India**¹.

This situation is **set to have a lasting impact on a child's socio-emotional and mental health, as well as on overall learning outcomes**, with the potential to **widen the disparity for children from disadvantaged backgrounds**. With the adoption of alternate channels for delivery, such as the use of technology, the socio-economic gaps might widen. It is also observed that in the time of adversity, the

maximum impact in terms of drop outs, violence or mental health is on marginalised groups and girls.

The pandemic has compelled the system to focus all efforts on **setting protocols for health and safety**, adopting **quick and agile response measures**, and developing **solutions to minimise the impact on student learning** in the short and long run.

Proposed approaches

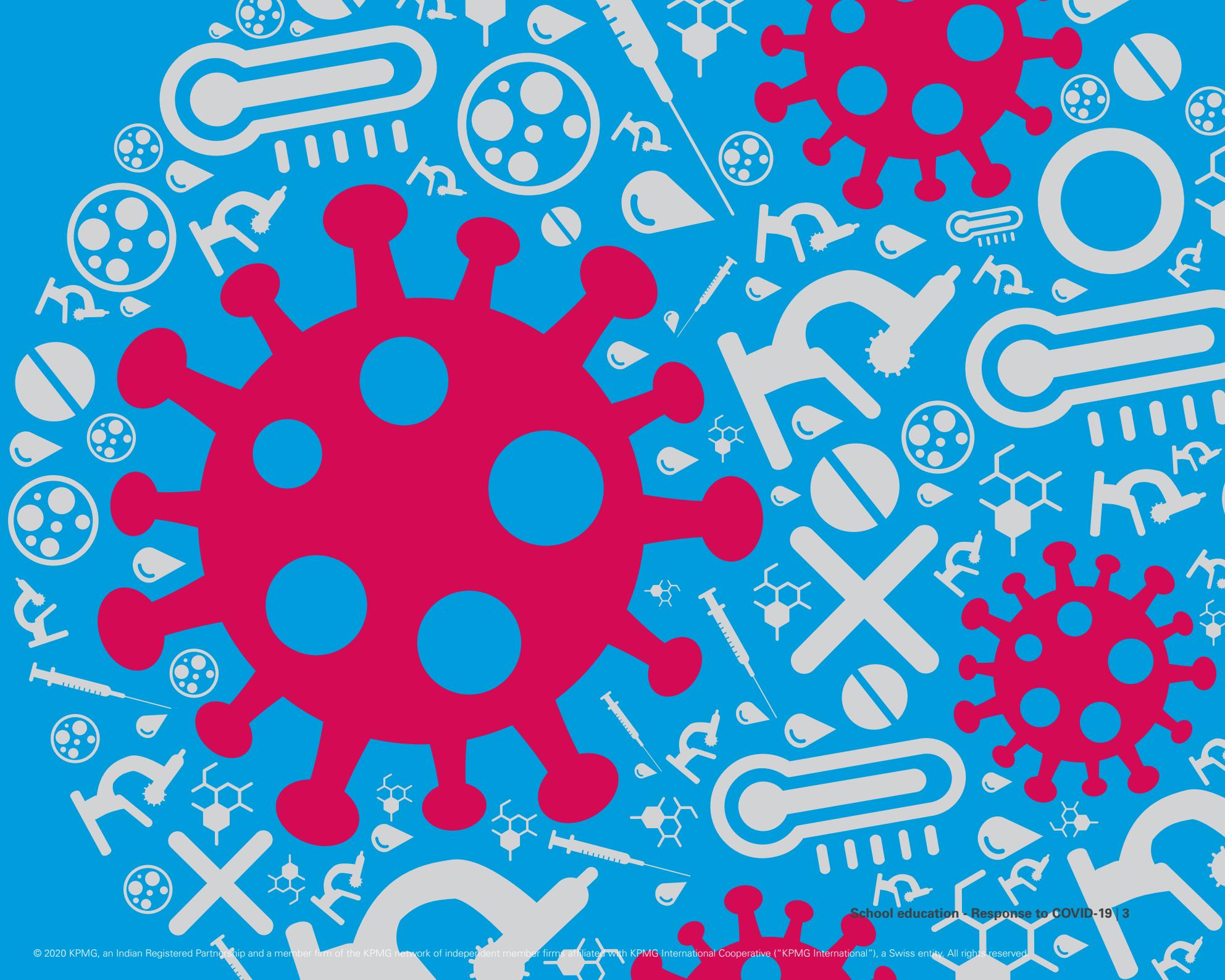
The current situation has compelled stakeholders to **reimagine education delivery**, since schools will need to operate differently once they re-open. This report highlights **areas of key concerns impeding education delivery** as well as areas that deserve to be reimagined to ensure continuity in education delivery and to build resilience in the sector.

A proposed response to the current situation is phased into three parts:

Immediate response: (1) Continuous **engagement** and effective **communication** with key stakeholders including students, parents, teachers and school leaders. (2) Utilise **alternate channels for delivery** such as mass media for learning and communication. (3) **Plan for school opening** in a safe and hygienic manner and develop necessary capacity

Short-term Recovery: (1) Focus on **bringing students back to school** in a phased manner. (2) Mitigate drop-outs and impact of lockdown on **physical and mental health** of students

Medium Term Preparedness: (1) **Improve resilience** for the school education system (2) **Institutionalise behavior change** towards adoption of safe and hygienic practices, implementing an emergency response protocol and adopting technology.



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1. Challenges faced by the sector



Specific Challenges due to COVID-19

01

No clear roadmap or timeline for **school re-opening**

02

Prolonged school closure could result in students losing up to 12 months of school, thereby causing large disruptions in learning

03

School closures could **widen the learning gaps for disadvantaged children** (minorities, girls, poor economic backgrounds)

04

Increased risk of **drop-outs** and **decrease in attendance**, especially among disadvantaged students

05

Postponement / cancellation of high stake exams leads to challenges in promotion of students at critical stages

06

Current **academic calendar** will not be suitable for the changing scenario in the coming academic year

07

Delay in annual education operations (academic calendar, distribution of text-books, uniforms, meals)

08

Safety and well-being of teachers and students and improving **hygiene conditions** in schools is a priority

09

Maintaining **social distancing** once schools re-open presents a logistical and operational challenge

10

Impact of social isolation on mental health of all stakeholders needs to be determined and support provided

11

Families under financial stress might be **unable to pay school fee** and other expenses

12

Movement of students between public and private schools due to financial, infrastructure concerns

Implications on the system



- The education **system is unprepared** for an emergency of this nature; there needs to be enhanced preparedness for emergencies
- Responding to this crisis will involve a **paradigm shift in education delivery**; new and innovative methods to deliver continuous learning will need to be explored
- The response presents an opportunity to make our school, education, and child-development systems more **responsive to the needs of individual learners**

Response of the system

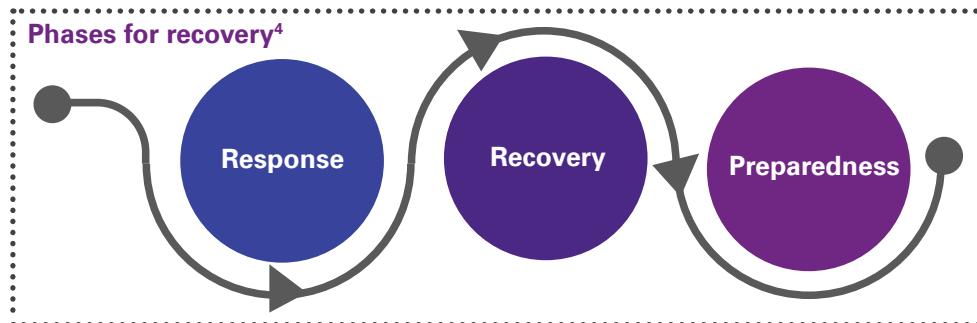


- All educational institutions to remain closed until further notice
- The government has instructed Anganwadi centres in the state to deliver free mid-day meals to the children registered under the Integrated Child Development Services².
- Focus on delivery of educational content through digital methods (Himachal Pradesh is using social media and messaging applications, Madhya Pradesh launched Top Parent app)³
- TV channels and other channels to be used for educational purposes

2. Roadmap for recovery



Framework for recovery



Response (immediate):

- Restore educational access to all students through alternate channels
- Continuous engagement and communication with parents and students
- Plan for safe reopening of schools

Recovery (short-term):

- Ensure children come back to school
- Build capacity of teachers to mitigate impact of closures
- Deliver education services in a guided form, to ensure business continuity

Preparedness (medium-term):

- Build resilience and adaptability in the ecosystem
- Institutionalise behavior change and adoption of safe and hygienic practices
- Reimagine education delivery, curriculum and role of teachers

Domains of action

Enabling resources: Funding to be reallocated, school operations to be quickened and efficiencies to be improved

Teaching – learning: Loss in learning days to be compensated; digital and other interventions to be used to deliver learning

Progress and attainment: Systems to prevent dropout and completion; system for assessments to be revised

Teacher capacity and school leadership: Teachers and school leaders to be equipped to handle emergency situations, leverage technology to continually engage children

Health and safety: Protocols for health and safety to be executed and monitored

Parent and community engagement: Constant communication with parents, community members to enable their participation in children's learning

Phase-wise roadmap for recovery from COVID-19

- **Ensure thorough sanitisation of school premises** before schools re-open
- **Develop protocols for interpersonal engagement**, and monitoring basic safety and health of students
- Develop **guidance notes on use of digital resources** (messaging, phone calls) for teachers to engage with students during lockdown.
- Disseminate notes to students/teachers on available digital learning resources to continue learning
- **Plan for content and guidance delivery through alternate channels** of education delivery during lockdown (radio, TV, mass media),
- **Awareness through mass media** on importance of continuing education, and parental engagement

01

Immediate response



- **Ensure safety and hygiene**, and all preventive measures once schools re-open
- Plan for **limited classroom strength** through alternate ways like block teaching
- **Reprioritise curriculum** mapped to learning objectives for a changing future, adopt best practices for hygiene
- **Capacity building of teachers** for identification of symptoms, parent engagement, remediation when needed
- Ensure business continuity by **relaxation of regulations** such as attendance and assessment criteria, fee waivers in private schools
- Preparing for **remote assessments / examinations**
- Communication strategy to convey safeguards in schools

02

Short-term Recovery



- Strengthen **digital infrastructure** and centralised repository of **digital content** accessible through low bandwidth mode and on several devices.
- Budget for **emergency response** and prepare response protocols
- Institutionalise **behavior change** for safe and hygienic practices and adoption of technology
- **Prevent drop outs** through incentives and awareness campaigns. Create **counselling support** for students and parents
- Build **resilience and adaptability** in students
- Mentor teachers to become facilitators and 'Edupreneurs'
- Reimagine the school week away from physical classrooms

03

Medium Term Preparedness



3. Potential response by the sector

Phase 1: Response (immediate) Engagement during lockdown



Current challenge	Key response areas	Stakeholders/ Key Enablers
1. Prolonged school closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for prolonged school shutdowns by keeping all stakeholders informed and engaged Periodic calls with education experts; partnerships with EdTech platforms to access their digital resources; partnership with communication platforms to ensure seamless digital communication for stakeholders while in lockdown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synergise efforts to engage and leverage from private stakeholders
2. Limited student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that teachers regularly check in on students (at least once every 10 – 15 days) for both educational and engagement purposes. Ensure that students are healthy and are engaging with school work Disseminate guidelines (for teachers) on productive ways to use social media or messaging apps for engagement during lockdown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective guidance and support for teachers to use tactics of remote engagement and monitoring
3. Disrupted education delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curate learning content for all grades from the available EdTech platforms and resources Train all teachers on use of digital content and method of delivery to students of each grade while in lockdown Develop delivery mechanism of printed learning material to students in areas with limited digital access; identify routes of delivery along with mid-day meals/ rations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining education delivery through alternate channels through lockdown
4. Lack of parental participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate public guidelines on importance of parental engagement during lockdown to ensure students' emotional and physical well being and education continuity Develop and publicly disseminate toolkits on activities parents could use to keep primary students engaged. Ensure availability of guidelines for parents to monitor digital education of secondary and higher secondary students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity building of parents on being caregivers and educators

Phase 1: Response

Engagement during lockdown - use of alternate channels of delivery



Channels of delivery and mass media

Asynchronous (Web based Learning Management Systems) and synchronous (video conferencing) platforms wherever internet is available

Regional TV and radio channels could be set up especially for primary classes with specific daily slots to air activity based learning modules for each grade

Utilising largescale mobile penetration in India, schools should use social media and messaging apps or education specific apps to share lessons and tests

Potential use by different groups

Students

- Primary grade students could benefit most from regional TV/ radio channel lessons with activity based learning techniques. This channel has better access equity ensuring continuity of education for maximum students
- Grade 6-9th could benefit most from the use of social media and messaging apps to receive lessons and tests
- Higher classes could benefit most from the use of advanced interaction and learning platform to aid complex learning and mentoring needs

Educators/teachers

- Teacher and educator groups will be able to utilise different mediums for different needs
- For interpersonal academic discussions and knowledge sharing among teachers on lesson planning etc. can be best done using Asynchronous (web based Learning Management Systems) and synchronous (video conferencing) platforms
- For interactions with students, teachers should evaluate access equity as well as age group of their students and use mobile apps or curate interactive learning content that can be aired on TV/radio channels

Parents

- Parents could use these channels for their ward's education to supplement the limited classes and lessons provided by a teacher during lockdown time

Phase 1: Response (immediate) Planning for schools to re-open



Current challenge	Key response areas	Stakeholders/ Key Enablers
1. Safety of school premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lockdown period to be utilised for mandatory sanitisation of all public and private schools Develop protocols (by age, school location) to ensure safe return of students to schools post lockdown, especially around health and safety monitoring of students Procure devices for health monitoring of students and teachers, to be used once school sessions resume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective coordination with school administration to deploy necessary precautions <p>Municipal Corporations, Disaster management department, Health department</p>
2. Preventing transmission of disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare detailed guidelines for teachers to recognise symptoms, provide first response and maintain social distancing once schools reopen Develop guidelines to limit exposure including reduced class size, block teaching, creating multiple batches, timetabling alternate weeks for student attendance, multiple school shifts with fewer students per shift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and document key learnings for emergency response <p>CBSE, CICSE, State boards</p>
3. Low teacher preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop quick guides/ FAQs to help teachers during disrupted teaching schedules Make available digital literacy guides for teachers to be able to use identified digital platforms most equitably and efficiently Set up state helplines for teacher queries and assistance on technical guidance on use of digital mediums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick facilitation of teachers to capacitate them to handle situation <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCERT, SCERTs, CBSE, CICSE</p>
4. Single mode of education delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan for long term use of alternate channels for education delivery (radio, TV, mass media), should the lockdown be lifted in phases throughout AY 2021 Develop awareness campaigns to be disseminated to the public and students via mass media on (1) why school / education is necessary (2) how a blended learning apparatus will ensure limited learning loss Plan for small group tutorial time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building strategy for long term lockdown using alternate channels and resources <p>School Leadership and Management, CBSE, CICSE, State Education boards etc.</p>



Phase 2: Recovery (short-term)

Restore basic education functions in schools and classrooms

Current challenge	Key response areas	Stakeholders/ Key Enablers
1. Unclear timelines for school re-opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing appropriate timelines for school opening; differential timelines for ECED, elementary, secondary and higher secondary, as required Delay re-opening in hotspots, leverage alternate channels (digital, radio, TV) and allow for physical distribution of learning material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining education delivery through alternate channels during lockdown <p>MHRD, State Education Departments</p>
2. Social distancing and safety after re-opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying alternate channels for communication and participation to avoid gatherings- such as assemblies, celebrations, play ground time etc. Monitor enforcement of social distancing and precautionary practices such as use of masks, Where possible, use open spaces for instruction Constant reinforcement and communication to teachers on safe response to COVID-19; training modules delivered through social media or other digital methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective training and capacity building support to teachers for response <p>NCTE, State Education Department, MoWCD, MHRD, NCERT, SCERTs</p>
3. Equity or learning gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe trends for attendance and drop outs and plan for interventions to prevent drop outs through DBTs/ Cash transfers, engaging students through alternate channels in case of absence in classrooms due to inhibition to attend schools after lockdown Ensure delivery Mid day Meals, leveraging NGO networks Plan for remediation and bridge programmes, especially for secondary classes, in view of the automatic promotions announced by various state governments⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem identification and alignment on common objective <p>DEA, MHRD, State Education Departments, NCTE, NCERT, SCERTs</p>
4. Parent engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers to limit engagement and interaction with parents (such as for PTAs), and conduct this through telephones, social media, digital reporting as much as possible Build awareness about COVID-19 symptoms and response. Provide support for engagement with child at home and be a nodal point for any counselling support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity building of teachers as nodal points, adoption of alternate communication channels <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCTE</p>



Phase 2: Recovery (short-term)

Systemic reinvention required while restoring basic functions of the education system

Current challenge	Key response areas	Stakeholders/ Key Enablers
1. Curriculum changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate changes in curriculum to sensitise students on hygiene, emergency response situations, climate change Focus on improving soft skills of students (such as resilience, adaptability, critical thinking), to prepare them for a changing future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and document key learnings for emergency response <p>NCERT, SCERTs, MHRD</p>
2. School Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit areas for relaxation of regulations to ensure business continuity in the short run, such as attendance requirements, assessment criteria, teacher qualification, calendar days for in class instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify high impact relaxation areas with least negative externalities <p>CBSE, CICSE, State boards</p>
3. Reinventing assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify alternative channels for formative assessments such as remote proctored assessments, evaluate impact on summative assessments based on timelines for lockdown period and academic calendar days lost, and accordingly make decisions on examinations and assessments for AY 2020-21 Implement staggered assessment systems, where remote assessments are not possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick deployment and adoption of alternate assessment channels <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCERT, SCERTs, CBSE, CICSE</p>
4. Business continuity of private schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to a shortened academic calendar, financial disruptions, parents may be unwilling or unable to pay full fees and other expenses for the academic year. Schools will need to realign financial projections and operating plans based on expected fee recovery, and identify alternate mechanisms to bridge expenses if needed, and communicate fee relaxations to parents Prepare a communication plan for parents to disseminate steps taken for response and recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realignment of expenses or identification of alternate source of funding <p>School Leadership and Management, CBSE, CICSE, State Education boards etc.</p>

Phase 3: Preparedness (medium-term)

Prepare and plan to improve resilience of sector



Current challenge	Key response areas	Stakeholders/ Key Enablers
1. Strengthening channels for education delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and deploy a digital competency mapping tool for teachers to assess and improve overall digital competence, identify training partners and calendarise teacher training sessions on digital infrastructure Identify modes and budget for large scale procurement of new IT infrastructure to support continued digital delivery of education, especially plug and play resources, smart TVs for classrooms, LMS with learning analytics and testing modules Design an Education Information Management Systems (EMIS) that systematically records data on impact of disasters on education, for use in risk reduction, capacity mapping, response planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget realignment and effective procurement Large scale capacity building drives for teachers <p>MHRD, Education Finance committees, State education boards, Private training partners, IT firms</p>
2. Institutionalise change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalise behavior change to ensure stakeholders maintain good practices for hygiene, continuous health check ups, adopt alternate modes of education delivery etc. Strategise to mitigate the impact of social isolation on children through counselling and other safeguards; continue parent engagement at home Budget for emergency response, adopt safety and health protocols Awareness building with parents and communities on responding to emergency situations, adoption of alternate channels of education delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document learnings Deliver key communication messages in an impactful manner <p>MHRD, Ministry of Women and Child Development, State Departments of Education</p>
3. Ensure retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify patterns and reasons for dropout or low attendance once schools reopen (economic opportunity costs, long periods of disengagement, other household responsibilities, migration); Identify need and beneficiaries for receiving incentives Redistribute budgets and resources to incorporate costs for incentives Provide counselling or remediation support in case of long period of disengagement Ensure communication of safeguards and practices adopted in schools for prevention Awareness building for benefits and success stories of staying in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick deployment and adoption of alternate assessment channels <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCERT, SCERTs, CBSE, CICSE, NCTE, NEUPA</p>

Phase 3: Preparedness (medium-term)

Prepare and plan to improve resilience of sector



Current challenge	Key response areas	Stakeholders/ Key Enablers
4. Role of teachers as facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of educators will need to move towards facilitating young people's development as contributing members of society, which will include inculcation of resilience, emotional intelligence, flexibility and adaptability, entrepreneurial skills, creativity and critical thinking and continuous learning Teachers will need to guide as 'Edupreneurs' rather than knowledge holders in the classroom in order to develop holistic individuals who are able to cope in the time of adversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to create a holistic pre training and in service training ecosystem driven by global best practices <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCTE, NCERT, SCERTs</p>
5. Reimagining the school week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The period of lockdown and post lockdown will unravel different mechanisms for education delivery and learning under 'unnatural' circumstances. In order to embed agility and holistic approach into the ecosystem there is a need to reimagine the school week and the model for complete education delivery in classrooms. This includes inculcating a day for Home based Projects/ Learning, Individual time with teachers in the class or through technology/ phone, Community Projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onboarding members of the community, behavior change for adoption <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCERT, SCERTs, CBSE, CICSE, NIOS</p>
6. Alignment of school education with technical and life skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rapidly advancing workforce globally, young people will require resilience and adaptability – along with non replaceable technical skills. Inculcating life skills such as creativity, communication and collaboration, alongside empathy and emotional intelligence is imperative for learners. This needs to be delivered through a practice oriented approach embedded in the curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedding technical and life skills building into the curriculum and assessments <p>MHRD, State Education Departments, NCERT, SCERTs, CBSE, CICSE, NCVT, MSDE</p>



Footnotes

1. UDISE data, 2016-17
2. Online Education in India 2021, KPMG India and Google, 2017
3. Local food systems and COVID-19; A glimpse on India's responses, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, April 2020
4. News Reports- 'Virtual classrooms' engage Himachal Pradesh students, Times of India 27 March 2020, Madhya Pradesh CM Chouhan launches "Top Parent" app for students, India Education Diary, 8 April 2020
5. Disaster Recovery Guidance Series Education Sector Recovery, The World Bank and GFDRR, 2019
6. Multiple News Reports- COVID-19: Students of Gujarat schools to be promoted sans exams, Economic Times, 24 March 2020, COVID-19: Madhya Pradesh govt to promote students sans exams, Economic Times, 29 March 2020 etc.

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