

TEACHERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

A VIRTUAL SUMMIT
GIVING TEACHERS IN
EVERY
CORNER OF THE WORLD A
VOICE AT THE TOP TABLE

TUESDAY 26TH MAY 2020



#COVID19

Supporting Teachers in back-to-school Efforts

The **Varkey Foundation** organized a virtual global teachers' summit on May 26th, 2020 entitled '**Teachers of the World Unite**'. The summit was built around a new toolkit, issued by the UNESCO Teacher Taskforce, which provides guidance for school leaders and teachers as schools reopen after weeks of lockdown because of COVID-19. The discussions were structured around seven themes addressed in the toolkit: Social dialogue and communication; Safety and health; Teachers' psychological and social-emotional well-being; Teacher preparation and learning; Deployment, teachers' rights and working conditions; Financial resources and investments; Monitoring and evaluation.

As evident from the discussions during the summit, teachers in every corner of the world are eagerly waiting for their schools to reopen. The participating teachers discussed various issues that need to be addressed while planning the reopening of schools all over the world. Primarily, they are concerned about the health and safety of the teachers as the pandemic has not yet subsided in most parts of the world. They are also apprehensive about education getting lesser attention from governments as the focus is currently on the health sector. The participants advocated the importance of reinstating schools, demanding support from policymakers and administrators both in terms of greater funding and more inclusiveness in decision-making processes. The stakeholders in the education sectors around the world will need to communicate, collaborate and cooperate with each other for the successful reopening of schools.

This document sets out the key points of agreement in the discussions on each topic and recommendations for schools and governments.

1. Social dialogue and communication

There is an urgent need for new and improved channels of communication both within and between the educational institutions in order to unify the efforts being made to reopen the schools safely. It is also important that all the stakeholders involved in the safe reopening of the schools viz., teachers, governments, health workers and businesses participate equally in the formulation of effective strategies.

Recommendations for schools

- On resuming school operations, teachers and staff should be informed about necessary measures and precautions required for their safety against COVID-19. For this, safety guidelines and protocols should be documented, shared and adhered to strictly.
- Schools should strengthen the parent-school partnership by encouraging greater parental involvement in their child's education and opening up new channels of communication between teachers and parents.

- Reopening of schools would require an enormous amount of work. This will put stress on the existing staff and teachers, with longer hours of work affecting their quality of work. Hence, there will be a need for effective manpower management.
- Teachers should collaborate, communicate and coordinate with their peers to resume teaching in schools.

Recommendations for governments

- Governments should provide teachers with new platforms to voice their feelings and experiences and support them in times of emotional distress arising out of difficult situations like the current pandemic.
- There is a need for policymakers to consult more with the teaching community over their decision-making in the process of reopening schools.

2. Safety and health

The health and safety of the school staff is one of the major issues of concern amongst the teachers. The teachers stressed the need to ensure that all safety protocols are followed before the reopening of the schools without jeopardizing anyone's health or well-being.

Recommendations for schools

- Create a friendly atmosphere in schools that allows for informal bonding among the teachers. This will be beneficial for their psychological health. Schools and health centers should collaborate and work together.
- Extensive investment is required by the relevant authorities for recruiting sanitary personnel and financing resources to maintain hygiene and sanitation in educational institutions.
- Set protocols for personal and collective hygiene care and provide PPEs for teachers and staff working in high-risk locations.
- While guaranteeing access to education for all, we should take into account the risk posed by crowded places like schools in spreading the disease. Therefore, adequate measures should be taken to help the students and teachers to maintain physical distance among themselves. This can include reducing the number of students in a classroom, conducting the school in morning and evening shifts and giving breaks to students during school hours in rotation.
- Improve the infrastructure of schools to ensure better cleaning of the premises, availability of clean drinking water, provision of hand soaps and all-day supply of water in washrooms.

Recommendations for governments

- Give autonomy to schools to deviate from the regulations regarding school reopening as per their requirement, either by the type of school (rural, urban, border, boarding school) or by the

level of vulnerability they face to the spread of COVID-19.

- Guidelines and recommendations for reopening of schools must adopt a local perspective.
- Since we are facing extraordinary challenges, allow relaxation in rules and regulations for school operations so that each school can plan a reorganization of working hours, teaching and non-teaching staff and use of school premises.

3. Teachers' psychological and social-emotional well-being

Teachers from different countries shared some of the difficulties they are experiencing in conducting virtual classes and maintaining their relationships with students and colleagues in the present scenario. Factors such as the absence of face to face interaction with their students, the pressure to deliver learning outcomes and adopting new technological tools for virtual teaching are causing psychological distress and disrupting the work/life balance. Also, long hours of screen time and sedentary lifestyle during lockdowns is affecting the physical health of teachers and students.

Recommendations for schools

- Create platforms and mechanisms for discussing and reducing stress in schools.
- Restructure work schedules and set flexible times for communication with students and their families.
- Reduce administrative requirements and other obligations that add to stress at work.
- Promote cultural and artistic activities to help students process their emotions and newfound isolation.
- Introduce classroom activities that allow students to express their emotions (e.g. shared journals, protocols to protect them from cyberbullying, etc.)

Recommendations for governments

- Give attention to the mental health of students and teachers and provide medical assistance at the schools or facilities located near them.
- Invest in technological training for educational leaders, students and staff.

4. Teacher preparation and learning

The teachers participating in the summit unanimously agreed that they need to upgrade their technical skills and learn new teaching methodologies to work in the conditions created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were also of the view that there should be ample opportunities for them to contribute to the creation of new learning systems and the exchange of ideas and knowledge within learning communities. The teachers were aware of the fact that they have an indispensable role in the education system and are prepared to face the challenges they will meet in the coming times.

Recommendations for schools

- We need to innovate new ways of teaching that will be sustainable in times of crisis, like this one. Generate platforms to exchange ideas with colleagues, open dialogues on new ideas and promote critical thinking.
- There should be greater participation from students, parents, principals and colleagues in drafting proposals on a new approach to teaching.
- Look at the best practices in teaching from across the world and implement them in local classrooms.
- Focus on the core content of the curriculum and teach with flexibility and creativity.

Recommendations for governments

- Work on a global curriculum collaboration where teachers can pool resources together.
- Develop a strategy to reduce the learning gap between the students who were able to successfully meet their learning goals during the remote learning period and those who were not.
- Include lessons on health, social and psychological well-being and community health in the core curriculum taught in schools.
- Teachers identified the following teaching strategies as useful and recommended more development in their techniques: active learning methods, flipped classroom, project-based learning, formative assessment, use of technology to teach remotely and life-skills development.

5. Deployment, teachers' rights and working conditions

The teachers highlighted at the summit that there were numerous problems that they were facing before the COVID-19 pandemic, which have now worsened because of the crisis. Large class size, the fragility of contracts, inadequate number of teachers, defective or non-existent representation at different decision-making levels and lack of adequate training were some of the difficulties the teachers were dealing with. Other aspects of their professional life worsened by the current situation include the attempt by some local governments to implement non-contextualized measures or resources, the excessive demands from administrative agents on teaching practices, the reduction of their personal and family time due to work overload, the difficulties associated with adapting to a blended model, and how their individual needs have been ignored by stakeholders and governments over the past few months.

At the summit, the participating teachers proposed the following recommendations to improve and safeguard their working conditions.

Recommendations for schools

- Conduct virtual meetings with fellow teachers to share good practices and suggestions as a way of strengthening teamwork.
- Reach out to other members of the teaching community and taking the initiative to stay

informed on developments in the teaching world.

- Develop a mindset to face the challenges emerging out of this changing scenario.
- Teachers should be enrolled for professional development programs that prepare them for remote teaching. The training sessions should be conducted during regular working hours rather than at the expense of teachers' free time.

Recommendations for governments

There should be a strong commitment from Education Departments & Ministries to address the concerns and demands of the teachers. They should take measures to ensure the safety of the teachers and students, such as distributing appropriate health and security equipment when schools finally reopen.

- The software used in remote teaching should be provided free of cost to the teachers. The administrators should commit to providing low-cost digital resources for teaching remotely in the long run.
- The government should ensure that there are support systems for all students to access remote learning at home. This will minimize future challenges for teachers and students.
- Strengthen the role of school leaders in identifying the needs of the members of their educational community.
- The guidelines designed by the government for the reopening of schools should be based on the principles of equality and inclusiveness because very often students of the same school have unequal access to resources as they come from all types of socio-economic backgrounds.

6. Financial resources and investments

As most governments are now focused on upgrading their public health systems and reviving their economies, the teachers are apprehensive that the education sector might not receive the ample attention that it deserves. With millions of people losing their means of livelihood, it is very likely and economic inequalities will rise and those who are socially disadvantaged will suffer the most. Since education plays an important role in the fight against socio-economic disparities, it is the responsibility of the governments to invest more in the education systems and support the reopening of schools.

Recommendations for schools

- Schools will require additional funding to maintain health and safety upon reopening, in particular to maintain sanitary conditions, to take care of special needs of students, reduce the student-classroom ratio and to hire more teaching and non-teaching staff.
- Schools might need experts to supervise the implementation of the hygiene protocols in schools.

Recommendations for governments

- Since the pandemic and resulting lockdowns have affected the students and teachers psychologically; mental health care should be made available to all.
- Governments should invest in technology and infrastructure to provide good internet connectivity to everyone and ensure that each student has their own digital device.
- For the health and safety of students, the government should invest in school infrastructure, teacher training and hygiene supplies. Teachers should be consulted for the resources they require for their schools.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Since switching to remote teaching and online learning happened abruptly, few or no situational assessment had been carried out in the regions where the teachers are currently working. For some of the participants, the process of data collection in their communities was carried out through the implementation of tools that had been developed for different contexts. Participants had many questions related to how policymakers will help teachers and students adapt to this new mode of operation and offer continuous insight through ongoing consultations.

Recommendations for schools

- The social-emotional state of students and their families should be included in any type of evaluation and monitoring procedure implemented at schools.
- Develop strategy to orient parents on how to support their children in their learning process is to enhance the monitoring systems.
- Designate one day or half-day per week dedicated to evaluating how students and their families are dealing with pandemic-related problems.
- Create digital tools that allow teachers to keep track of their students' learning process. It would result in an effective way to identify the main academic challenges to be addressed by teachers.

Recommendations for governments

- There should be agreement among all stakeholders on how to equitably evaluate the teachers' performance.
- Develop and implement national and school-based EdTech policies.
- Conduct formative assessments of remote learning effectiveness to improve teacher development and performance.
- Establish explicit expectations for teachers, including expectations focused on remote learning competencies and overall performance.

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- Create a protocol for work from home and school during the pandemic. For example, institute a special absence policy for teachers and students who contract Covid-19.
- Organizations like UNESCO should continue to use information from a comprehensive sample population to make recommendations.
- Teachers should be receiving regular feedback from school administrators.
- Mapping is critical. Policymakers may need to factor in the cost to cover additional expenses incurred by teachers working to stay connected to their online learners. Some schools are using in-house teacher consultations to guide policy.