



Professional Learning Communities

A toolkit for school leaders in back-to-school efforts after COVID-19 closures

Adapted from the UNESCO toolkit for "Supporting teachers in back-to-school efforts: A toolkit for school leaders"

June 2020

About this toolkit

This toolkit is a guide to school leaders to ensure safe environment to students and teachers during and post COVID-19 lock down. Through an approach of professional learning communities (PLC) used by VVOB, school leaders will share and discuss strategies to ensure school safety, security, and cleanliness of the school environment; ensure online teaching and learning and preparation for school reopen in September 2020. Contextualised from the UNESCO toolkit on “Supporting teachers in back-to-school efforts: A toolkit for school leaders”, VVOB will use this toolkit to support school leaders in getting prepared for school reopening. School leaders gathering in monthly PLCs will get an opportunity of sharing different experiences and strategies related to the preparation for school reopening after COVID-19 lock down.

This toolkit introduces seven dimensions of school re-opening that will be addressed in two PLC sessions:

PLC session	Dates	Dimension to be addressed	Link to the School Improvement Plan (SIP)
PLC session 1	10 th - 30 th July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching and learning Safety and healthy environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal no 1: Improved strategies to support teaching and learning during and post COVID-19 lock down Goal no 2: Improved and sustained safe and health school environment
PLC session 2	1 st - 30 th August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dealing with psychological and socio-emotional well-being related challenges Social dialogue & communication for school re-opening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal no 3: Developed strategies to respond to psychological and socio-emotional well-being of students and teachers Goal no 4: Developed and communicated the SIP with clear goals (priorities)
Cross cutting dimensions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity related challenges on accessibility and use of ICT devices Gender related issues such as GBV, teenage pregnancies among students, dropouts among others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected on national examination results per level of study, subject and aggregate to assess level of dropouts Linked to chapter 2 of the SIP that assesses the situational analysis currently during the COVID-19 pandemic
		Monitoring and evaluation	Activities to evaluate the implementation of the SIP

For each of the PLC sessions, a guiding **question** is proposed, as well as a **checklist** is provided to SEIs that can facilitate the discussions and the sharing of experiences and good practices. For each of the PLC sessions, follow up actions will be documented for the SIP that will guide school leaders when schools reopen in September 2020. After all PLC sessions, school leaders are expected to submit their revised SIP to the SEI.

Complementary to the online PLC sessions, REB is organising field visits to all schools to provide further assistance to school leaders in the development and revision of their respective SIPs.

1. Professional learning community meetings to be conducted on monthly basis

PLC session 1 (July 2020)

Session dimension focus 1: Teacher preparation and learning

Session introduction:

In line with stopping the spread of the Corona-virus, from March 2020 the Government implemented measures to minimise risk of transmission including border closings and stringent social distancing policies including closing schools, colleges, churches, and bars, and others. This led to the online teaching and learning using broadcasting lessons on TV and Radio stations while waiting for the school reopening planned in September 2020.

As part of preparations to the school reopening it is important for teachers and education support staff to receive adequate professional preparation and information to assume their responsibilities and meet expectations within the return-to-school efforts. School leaders need to ensure teachers are empowered to make decisions about teaching and learning.

In this PLC session, school leaders will discuss challenges related to the online learning during COVID-19 lock down and prepare strategies to overcome challenges they will meet when schools reopen.

Key guiding question for the PLC meeting

- **How can we ensure the online/distance learning and be prepared to support the continuation of learning when schools reopen?**

During the PLC discussion, members will have shared experiences and strategies on the teaching and learning online during the lock down and when schools reopen. After the session participants will check the following:

Please tick the checklist below basing on the discussions you focused on in the PLC meeting

Have you considered:

- Regular actions and strategies to monitor the online leaning of students are in place during the lock down?
- Working with teachers, parents, and local leaders to ensure that students don't drop out during the online learning and vulnerable children as well as remote students are supported to continue the learning online?

For school reopening, have you considered:

- Possibilities for providing professional support to your staff, including training, coaching/mentoring and checklists/learning aids?
- Considered to support teachers to identify learning gaps and choosing instructional strategies, including support for disadvantaged learners, remain key?
- Undertaking rapid, continuous assessments of learners' progress and well-being, as well as tackling persisting gaps and threats to equity and inclusion?
- Reorganising classrooms to allow delivery of individual instruction corresponding to accelerated learning and remedial responses?
- Effective classroom management skills to cope with new classroom organisation and teaching routines to ensure teachers' key role in providing quality teaching and achieving key learning outcomes? (P1 Double-Cohort)
- Accelerated learning and remedial education for those showing learning gaps, especially disadvantaged learners or those who suffered more significant learning disruption?
- Facilitating collaboration and peer support between teachers within our school, and, where feasible, between schools, based on previous lessons learnt during closures to exchange information, share tips on returning to school or facilitate sharing of materials?
- Developing a plan, with your staff, to prepare for quality teaching and learning to continue if schools close again?

Session dimension focus 2: Safety and health

Session overview:

As schools reopen, the health and safety of learners and school staff will be most critical. School leaders have a key role in maintaining a safe environment for teachers to work and students to learn.

The school has a responsibility to ensure the security and safety, on the way to, and from school to minimise the risk of new infections. This work needs to ensure that the day-to-day operations of the school include monitoring of the health status of students and staff, and implementing the School Guidance for COVID-19, for any suspected illness.

Guiding questions

- How can school leaders ensure the security, safety and hygiene of their schools and school materials during COVID-19 crisis?
- Which strategies are being used during the crisis to maintain school hygiene, security of school materials and property?

Using PLCs school leaders discuss and share strategies to ensure availability of cleaning materials and guidelines to have a safe school environment when schools open. At the end of this session, the below checklist will be filled and actions taken will be documented.

Have you considered:

- Put in place strategies of ensuring the security of school materials (available guards to ensure security during the lock-down)?
- Share strategies to keep the school clean during the lock down (a staff to clean school premises and materials books, computers; availability of water in schools for cleaning, etc.)?
- Hygiene and sanitation facilities mainly water, hand washing station and soaps available for students, staff and school visitors as well?
- Hand washing measures are maintained and audited rigorously, including frequent hand washing of all those who enter the school premises; regular and thorough cleaning of school premises; and regular promotion of health messages for increased understanding and awareness?
- Availability of a trained a staff/ teacher to undertake appropriate health and safety measures, including monitoring of potential COVID-19 cases within schools, guidance on who and how to monitor?
- Basic health services undertaken, including referral to health systems, needs to be given to schools and education institutions?
- Sharing guidelines used to facilitate monitoring every day the health status of students to avoid the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases within and beyond the school is stopped. Basic health and first aid provisions must available. These include thermometers, medical equipment, and referral system in case of necessity?
- Preventive measures such as canceling assemblies, sports games and other events that create crowded conditions, teach and model creating space and avoiding unnecessary touching?

Session outcome

- Priority 1 of the SIP: Improved strategies to support teaching and learning during and post COVID-19 lock down
- Priority 2 of the SIP: Improved and sustained safe and health school environment

Session dimension focus 1: Dealing with psychological and socio-emotional well-being related challenges

Session overview:

Return-to-school responses should anticipate the psychological and socio-emotional impacts of the pandemic on teachers and learners. Teachers as well as students may need additional psychological and socio-emotional support. A whole new set of vulnerabilities could have reared up during school closures, including disruption of vital safety nets such as school meals or exposure to other trauma in “at-risk” households. Reflecting on how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting your role as a school leader, your own psychological and socio-emotional wellbeing of students and your staff and students is essential.

Guiding question

- As school leaders, how are we prepared to ensure the well-being of students and teachers when school open?

During the PLC Session, participants will reflect and share practices on ensuring the psychological and social-emotional wellbeing of students and school staff.

Have you considered:

- In the absence of specialists in communities, focal points need to be identified and put in place, noting that in this case pre-training may need to be undertaken.
- Schools should ensure that staff and students receive, as and when needed, mental health and socio-emotional well-being support. This includes ensuring referrals to the appropriate social services.
- Strategies put in place to assess and address gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual and domestic violence for both teachers and students as well as the increased risk of early marriages and teenage unplanned pregnancy among students.
- Prioritising psychological and socio-emotional support for vulnerable and at-risk teachers, including those of advanced age, with pre-existing medical conditions, or disadvantaged by fewer resources and increased workloads due to taking extra shifts or engaging in blended learning?
- Schools need to maintain communication with the wider community, consult with and support parents and caretakers to support their children. Any stigma associated with COVID-19, including those recovering from infection, needs to be addressed by the schools.
- Exploring measures that could be taken to provide additional psychological and socio-emotional support for vulnerable and at-risk staff members, including those who have increased workloads due to the crisis?
- Exploring possibilities for more effective staff time management and reducing workload pressure, for example by streamlining or decreasing paperwork and other administrative responsibilities? Discussing with your staff how their roles have been affected by the crisis and how to manage and meet expectations once your school reopens?
- Working with your staff, local authorities, community members and other school leaders to support awareness-raising about COVID-19 related discrimination, bullying at school and eliminate exclusion at classroom, school and community levels for teachers and learners?

Session overview:

School reopening needs to be communicated to key stakeholders. Messages need to be crafted and the modalities for dissemination of the messages be determined. Communication should include how soon to inform key stakeholders on when the schools will be reopened and how to inform students, parents and caregivers, teachers and other personnel about school reopening.

A back-to-school campaign should be coordinated at national, province, district, sector, and community level to ensure all students return to school. The back-to-school campaign should continue throughout the first weeks of school reopening.

Parents within the larger community should be engaged and be encouraged to continue to support children learning at home; to collaborate with schools; as well as support learning after school.

Guiding question:

How can we be best prepared to communicate the reopening of schools to students, parents and the wider community?

Through professional learning communities school leaders share strategies to communicate the reopening of schools and to ensure that all students return to school.

Checklist of the actions taken. Have you considered:

- Before schools reopen every school/every leader should have an annual school improvement plan, with clear goals and strategies to implement it. Actions on the SIP are reflected from the PLC meeting resolutions?
- School leaders have a clear plan to be fully involved in the back-to-school campaign to ensure that all students return to school?
- School leaders ensure capacity development of teachers, on a needs-basis, prioritising critical interventions needed for teachers to ensure the appropriate skills needed are in place prior to the school reopening?
- Discuss strategies to support students at risk of exclusion and not returning to school. Schools leaders share experience on community mobilisation on bringing together efforts to support students who are not able to go back to school due to lack of school uniforms, scholastic materials and other reasons which can be discussed via direct home visits?

Session outcome

- Priority 3: Developed strategies to respond to psychological and socio-emotional well-being of students and teachers
- Priority 4 : Developed a school improvement plan with clear goals (priority) for the whole school year

2. Gender equity as a cross-cutting dimension

Key guiding question:

How can we integrate gender and equity in all actions and decisions taken?

In every PLC meeting and discussion on each dimension, gender and equity should be considered while taking decisions and actions. The following checklist will be filled at the end of each the PLC session.

Have you considered:

- Planning to monitor the return of students with consideration to sex-disaggregation of data to track any gaps in enrollment plus those with disabilities?
- Assessing and addressing issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual and domestic violence for both teachers and students as well as the increased risk of early marriages and teenage unplanned pregnancies among students as a result of COVID-19 lock down?
- Examining any specific implications for girls that may increase their risks, such as responsibility for taking care of the sick at home, or exploitation when out of school?
- Strategies to students facing the consequences of school closure and lock down which may result in child abuse in dysfunctional families, depression from loneliness that could expose them to vices like alcohol and drug abuse etc?
- Measures to ensure the safety of children and protection of vulnerable children like child headed households, children with disabilities, those from very poor households as well as those with special education needs?
- Exploring possibilities of providing inclusive and gender-responsive staff training and related resources, including checklists and toolkits on how to identify and work with learners experiencing distress, anxiety and other vulnerabilities related to COVID-19 (e.g. girls who may have suffered from sexual abuse, and/or early and unintended pregnancy during school closures, teachers that are attending to the members of their community affected by COVID-19, Sexual Reproductive Health packages for students at home in discussion with their parents)?
- Learners that cannot access ICT devices like TVs, radios, smart phones etc. to help in the REB e-learning to facilitate their learning as well as those whose parents never went to school and cannot help them with school related homework?

3. Monitoring and evaluation as cross-cutting dimension

The reopening of schools will require effective monitoring, evaluation and adaptations to the implementation of the SIP as deemed necessary. School leaders should adapt and use simple frameworks to measure progress of the SIP implementation. They should take into account teachers' roles in providing quality teaching and fostering a safe learning environment. In each session, participants will fill the below checklist.

Have you considered:

- School leaders and their staff, and other relevant stakeholders (including, for example, school general assemblies-SGAs) developing a monitoring and evaluation plan to determine the effectiveness of the return to-school effort and ongoing crisis response, including defining clear roles and responsibilities in the areas of data collection, analysis, documentation and reporting?
- School leaders and their staff, reviewing, adapting, and updating available systems for monitoring and tracking children's return, re-enrollment and retention based on learner group and be age specific?
- Identifying a system or mechanism for collecting specific COVID-19-related data, including suspected cases of infection and illness, contact tracing, and incidents of stress and anxiety, and put into place the support services needed, if possible?
- Identifying a system or mechanism for monitoring the situation of vulnerable and at-risk learners, including out-of-school children?
- Planning for a regular review of the school's COVID-19 response once the school has reopened, bringing together different actors to assess the situation, to adapt strategies, and to inform future actions with regard to the health crisis, and linking this review to the school improvement or development plan, if there is one?

Reference

- Supporting teachers in back-to-school efforts: A toolkit for school leaders, UNESCO, June 2020
- Online and Distance Learning Approach for PLCs during COVID-19 , VVOB, May 2020
- Education Sector School Reopening Plan: In Response to COVID-19, MINEDUC, May 2020