

SCHOOL SHUTDOWNS IN PANDEMIC ARE NOT ASSOCIATED WITH FEWER DEATHS, ANALYSIS SHOWS

- Study of 101 countries shows that a trade-off between keeping schools open, protecting health and protecting the economy is not inevitable
- Lessons from 15 countries balancing these three policy goals vital for policy-makers as the pandemic continues to unfold and disrupt learning
- Pandemic has cost world's children 199 billion closed days of school in 2020

Zurich, 25 January 2021 – One-year review of the negative impact of COVID-19 shows that 15 countries¹ have been able to balance public health, education, and economic outcomes, according to a report published today by [Insights for Education](#), an independent non-profit foundation based in Zurich, Switzerland, and dedicated to advancing evidence and improving education for every child.

As countries approach one year of school disruption, following Mongolia's first nationwide shutdown of schools on 27th January 2020, the report provides the first comprehensive and independent analysis of policy approaches and outcomes across 101 countries, drawing from data collected over a one-year period.

While policy makers face difficult and competing decisions to protect health, to minimise economic damage, and to keep children learning and safe, Insights for Education's analysis shows that the trade-off between these three policy goals is not inevitable. Divergent policy choices translate into dramatically different outcomes for the impact of COVID-19 on learning. Learning from experiences over the past year can impact future policy choices, especially in the face of emerging COVID-19 variants.

Insights for Education's CEO Dr. Randa Grob-Zakhary said: *"While it's been assumed that school closures are necessary to protect health, it's essential to study the evidence from these fifteen countries that have managed to balance the learning with the health and economic imperatives. Global experiences demonstrate that even under very challenging circumstances schools can be safely opened and, most often, remain open. Countries which have fared better, with the least learning disruption, prioritised reopening schools among emerging policy choices, and often secured strong community support for getting children back to school."*

After one year, the least negative disruption to learning has been seen in countries where infection levels were lowered relatively quickly so that schools could reopen before the start of a second infection wave, where there has been clear prioritisation of learning at the highest political levels, and that invested in meaningful community engagement to get children back to school. Ongoing transparency and communication have also been a shared feature of keeping schools open even in the face of rising infections.

At the other end of the spectrum, 13 countries² have been experiencing the highest losses of life and learning. The greatest number of days of disrupted learning have been seen in countries where multiple waves of infection ran into each other, providing less of a window to reopen between waves. Sometimes, these same countries have also prioritised the economy over education, and some have suffered from weak community support for returning to school.

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Japan, Mali, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

² Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Iran, Islamic Republic, Mexico, North Macedonia, Panama, Peru, United States.

Dr. Randa Grob-Zakhary added: *“As there won’t be a post-Covid period soon, countries have to help children flourish alongside Covid and stop this stop-start-pause with school closures and re-openings. Continuing to monitor and study global experiences as they unfold, is critical to enable better understanding of choices and their consequences, and to promote well-informed and contextually relevant choices to protect learning, health, and economies.”*

The full statistical analysis of these 101 countries concludes no correlation can be established between the number of disrupted school days and the number of COVID-19 related deaths. Additionally, the number of disrupted school days and decline in the economy are weakly correlated, and decline in the economy and deaths are also weakly correlated.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Insights for Education has been [tracking](#) and [analysing](#) COVID-19 and schools data globally, to support reopening decisions and recovery responses. In a [report](#) published on 1 October 2020, Insights for Education showed no consistent pattern between school status and COVID-19 cases. Insights for Education publishes a [live data story](#) showing the evolving impact of COVID-19 on schools. In 2020, pandemic cost the world’s children 199 billion closed days of school.

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[Link to Report](#)

[Link to Live Data Story and Interactive Chart](#)

About Insights for Education

Insights for Education is an independent non-profit foundation working to advance evidence and improve education for every child. Its mission is to build resources for education leaders by synthesising and translating an inclusive range of evidence, and to enable these resources to be used by those who make education happen by building bridges across knowledge actors, policy makers and practitioners. Established in 2019 and registered in Zurich, Switzerland, the foundation is supported by a visionary co-investor collective and is growing partnerships across governments, agencies, NGOs, universities, businesses and foundations in Africa, Middle East, Europe, and North America. For more information and to participate in this endeavour, visit education.org.

