



# **Reopening** Schools

A Strategic Guide to Safer School Operations in a Post-COVID World







## Introduction

As we emerge slowly from stringent lockdowns, society must reckon with the challenge of functioning in the COVID era. It is necessary to follow expert advice and directives on whether reopening schools would be safe. If advised to do so, safe reopening and operations will be a function of aggressive planning, diligent administration, and a sense of personal responsibility.

With over 250 million students - the vast majority without access to stable internet and connected devices - the Indian education system is ill-equipped to go online. Administrators will have to take steps to ensure their schools are safe, and students are able to keep pace with learning while contact hours are reduced.

Staff and student safety revolves around 2 key targets :

- Social Distancing
- Sanitation & Hygiene



### A Framework for Planning School Operations

In order to plan for every facet of school operations, we have used the below journey to walk through each step of an average school day. This document outlines how various stakeholders will have to respond in the face of the COVID crisis in order to make the school a safe environment for learning.

CAPACITY MANAGEMENT	ATTENDANCE	TRANSPORT	ENTRY	IN CLASS	BREAKS	EXTRAS EXI	т

## **Capacity Management**

ADMINISTRATION

Schools will have to start by evaluating the safe capacity of their available infrastructure. Classrooms will have to be reorganized such that students have a minimum of 6-foot distance from each other when seated.

A simple method to determine the maximum safe capacity of a classroom is to measure its length and breadth and apply the following formula.

Rule of Thumb: Have the board on the shorter side of the class

A = (Length - 4)/6 (Round down to closest whole number)

B = (Breadth + 4)/6 (Round down to closest whole number)

Total Safe Capacity of Classroom = (A x B) students

In some cases, based on the dimensions of the room and the layout (straight or staggered), it might be possible to accommodate 2-3 additional students.

This is will dramatically reduce classroom capacity from standard operations. Open areas such as fields and playgrounds may also be used for teacher-student interactions.

Once the new school capacity has been finalized, administrators will know what percentage of their school can attend at any given time, then ensuring contact hours with all students becomes the next operational consideration. For the purpose of explaining the following operational options, we have assumed a school where the maximum safe capacity is 50% (½) of standard operations i.e. if the school normally served 1000 students, now no more than 500 students may attend at any given time - therefore the school would have to be divided into 2 overarching batches or school sections. An important consideration when considering school operations will be the fact that students across grades have different furniture and infrastructure needs e.g. students from grades 1-3 would find it difficult to adjust to large benches in grade 8,9,10 classrooms. Therefore, school batches or sections would need to contain a mix of primary and secondary grades to ensure students can be mapped to classrooms with appropriate furniture.





## Capacity Management

ADMINISTRATION



### OPTION 1 - School sections attend school on alternate days

Schools could conduct classes on alternate days for sections/batches.

E.g. School Batch 1 conducted on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for 500 students (grades 1,3,5,7 and 9) and School Batch 2 conducted on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for 500 students (grades 2,4,6,8 and 10). As contact days are reduced for all students, schools may extend daily operational hours to recover overall student contact hours i.e. 9 AM-5 PM instead of 9 AM-3 PM. In order to ensure that students have appropriate furniture, each attending batch will have to comprise of students from both primary and secondary grades.

OPTION 1	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
School Batch 1	9 AM-5 PM		9 AM-5 PM		9 AM-5 PM	
School Batch 2		9 AM-5 PM		9 AM-5PM		9 AM-5 PM

### Benefits

• Transportation logistics for this operational transition are simpler as school bus, student entry and exit management would need to occur only once a day reducing the potential for chaos.

### Drawbacks

- Student attention spans do not cope-well with concentrated doses of lessons for extended hours - there are diminishing returns for added contact hours in a single sitting (additional breaks may be needed)
- Students will have constant engagement and disengagement with academics on an alternate day basis. Maintaining lesson continuity will be challenging for teachers.



## **Capacity Management**

ADMINISTRATION

### OPTION 2 - School Sections Attend Schools For Shortened Day Everyday

Schools could conduct classes for half a day for each section/batch. I.e. School Batch 1 (Grades 1,3,5,7 and 9) conducted daily from 7 AM - 11 AM for 500 students. School Batch 2 (Grades 2,4,6,8 and 10) conducted daily from (12 PM - 4 PM) for 500 students. In order to ensure that students have appropriate furniture, each attending batch will have to comprise of students from both primary and secondary grades. As daily contact hours are reduced, schools may choose to operate for a full day on Saturday to compensate.

OPTION 2	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
School Batch 1	7 AM-11 AM					
School Batch 2	12 PM-4 PM					

### Benefits

- Reduced daily contact hours align better with student attention spans.
- Students engage with supervised academic material on a daily basis.
- Such a system may eliminate the need for a long break.

### Drawbacks

- Managing buses, entry, exit, and daily operational logistics for all stakeholders is more convoluted - parents with more than one child may face significant transportation and daycare challenges as their wards may be in different batches.
- Managing safety and sanitation processes as students enter and exit school twice will be challenging for all staff
- Daily school operation will have to be lengthened as some potential contact hours will be lost as batches transition in-and-out of school.

The above options and variations of them are best applicable to schools with a maximum safe capacity close to 40-50% of their standard operating capacity.

Schools with a maximum safe operating capacity <40% of their standard operating capacity will have to divide their grades into 3-4 sections and may have to select an operating standard which is a combination of the above options i.e. schools will operate in two time-blocks daily and on alternate days. As outlined in the detailed samples provided in pages 20-24 of this document.



ATTENDANCE TRANSPORT ENTRY IN CLASS BREAKS EXTRAS EXIT

The first and most important decision any stakeholder has to make is the decision to attend school on a given day. The following checklist provides a logical basis to make an attendance decision-



School authorities must acknowledge that empowering all stakeholders to make the right attendance decision is critical to maintaining school safety. Staff and students must feel comfortable not attending school if they believe their health has been compromised in any way. Further, the importance of full transparency with regards to health issues pertaining to the pandemic must be impressed on all stakeholders, including parents. Tone of communication and subsequent compassionate actions at critical junctures such as COVID cases being identified amongst staff and students will drive positive downstream behaviour.

#### The Better Design Foundation

ATTENDANCE	TRANSPORT	ENTRY	IN CLASS	BREAKS	EXTRAS	EXIT
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It is essential that all stakeholders travel to school in a sanitary manner while practicing social distancing measures. Public transport is fraught with the possibility of transmission of the virus and care must be taken at every step to minimise risk.

- School buses must run at no more than 50% seating capacity to ensure safety
- School authorities should work with school bus providers to plan routes such that buses are able to maintain safe capacity
- School buses should be provided with a sanitization spot at entry where entering students can sanitize their hands.
- One member of faculty per bus route should be assigned to travel on the bus daily to ensure policy compliance.
- A reporting mechanism should be put in place for bus users to report policy violations. (weekly surveys may be conducted)

### School Bus



Wear masks at all times, ensuring nose and mouth are covered and avoid touching eyes.



Wipe own seat and surrounding surfaces at the start of journey



Seats are to be filled from back to front and emptied from front to back to minimize contact (First In Last Out)



Follow matrix seating patterns at all times to ensure social distancing



Minimise movement through the duration of the journey



Report to administration if service provider is operating buses at over 50% of the seating capacity



### Personal Transportation



Wipe own seat and surrounding surfaces at the start of journey



Wear masks at all times, ensuring nose and mouth are covered and avoid touching eyes.



Ensure route to school does not go through containment areas and red zones

**EXTRAS** 



If car-pooling, ensure that the car is at 75% capacity and carpoolers live in safe zones

### Walking / Cycling



Wear masks at all times, ensuring nose and mouth are covered and avoid touching eyes.



Do not walk through a containment zone



If cycling, try to wipe down bicycle at start of each journey



Try to maintain a distance of 6 feet from people on the road

ATTENDANCE	TRANSPORT	ENTRY	IN CLASS	BREAKS	EXTRAS	EXI

School entrances/gates are a common choke point where social distancing and sanitation measures may not stay in effect. It is essential to properly plan entry procedures to ensure safety.



Schools usually shut/ restrict entry to one or a few gates -this practice should be avoided. As many as possible/All school access points should be open to students during peak hours to prevent crowding.



All school buses should have staggered arrival slots such that not more than one bus arrives at any one school gate at a particular time. Routes and route timings need to be adjusted accordingly.



All staff to report to school in a 30 minute window prior to the earliest student reporting time unless staff is using the school bus to travel. Administrative or teaching staff may man extra open school access points during entry and exit to ensure a modicum of security.



All students not travelling by school bus are to be issued arrival time-slots mapped to school access points (if the school has multiple gates). Schools to issue a survey prior to reopening to understand the needs of students carpooling/travelling with other students or staff.



Students temperature should be recorded by the teachers at the point of entry without physical contact so that students running a temperature can be sent back home, if needed. At arrival, students should be provided with hand sanitizer or access to a hand wash area, before entering the classroom. All students should be wearing protective masks within the school premises.



Students to report directly to their desks in class where morning assembly/routines can be conducted with strict distancing measures in place. Assemblies and gatherings should be avoided.

ATTENDANCE TRANSPORT

IN CLASS

**ENTRY** 

BREAKS

EXTRAS

EXIT

All attending students at a given time (e.g. 50%) would have to be spread across all available classrooms, creating issues with standard operating student-teacher ratios and available teacher expertise.

As it is unlikely for schools to have the requisite staff on hand to map all attending students to teachers specializing in their grade, all teachers will have to attend school at all times (regardless of the batch/section in session) in order to allow for effective rotation and rest. Largely, teachers are split by expertise in primary grades and secondary grades. This distinction will have to be minimised. When primary school is in session, secondary teachers will have to engage some classrooms, and vice-versa. Such engagement will require strict lesson planning, using a standard format such that relatively inexperienced teachers can easily implement lessons across primary and secondary grades using the lesson plan as a reference. If there are more overall teachers than classrooms, secondary school teachers may rotate when primary school is in session and vice versa. A school with high number of teachers / student will be able to manage teacher rotation policies with greater flexibility. In schools with lower number of teachers / student, all teachers, regardless of area of expertise may be required to engage students across grades and subjects.

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Grade: Chapter:	Subject:			Grade Chapt	er: Subj	ect:
Blooms Taxonomy	Objectives	Big Questions	Date & Duration	Big Qi	uestion:	
Remember				Enga	ge:	Knowledge:
Understand				Explo	pre:	Skills:
Apply Analyze				Expla	in:	Values:
Evaluate				Elabo	orate:	Exposure::
Create				Evalu	late:	Homework:
	Curriculu	m Plan			L	esson Plan



ATTENDANCE	TRANSPORT	ENTRY	IN CLASS	BREAKS	EXTRAS	EXIT
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Overall contact hours with students will be reduced, however, dramatically reduced in-class student numbers will allow teachers to deliver higher quality lessons focussing on fundamental concepts. New operations will represent a significant strain on staff - schools could consider investing in the installation of television screens/monitors that can be used to deliver high quality curated content to engage students if no content specific teacher is available for a particular classroom. This system allows for a built-in backup/redundancy with a parallel visual media curriculum that can be used for unscheduled classes on a non-linear learning pathway for academic/extracurricular development.

### INTEGRATION

Integrating values and mindset development into every lesson will be essential due to reduced contact hours. Reflection and journaling at home could be used as tools to develop culture.

### LESSON PLANS

Teachers should plan lessons in advance, and create standard formats for lessons planning (5Es etc) such that all teachers can share in a common pool of lesson plans. Often teachers will be expected to teach classes outside of their area of expertise, and having a standard lesson plan format will allow teachers who are inexperienced in a subject to quickly frame a lesson and deliver it.

### CURRICULUM

Due to lowered contact hours, curriculums will have to be adjusted, with a renewed focus on fundamentals. E.g. Math - classrooms sessions could focus on concrete and pictorial learning with abstract learning and practice reserved for homework. For topics that recur through multiple grades - focussing on the essentials will be key.

### TOOLS

Students could use laminated plastic on paper with markers as makeshift work-boards to show their work to teachers from a distance.

### PEER LEARNING

Teachers should focus on larger group discussions over small group interactions to ensure that students remain engaged but are not expected to move close to each other for discussion.



ATTENDANCE	TRANSPORT	ENTRY	IN CLASS	BREAKS	EXTRAS	EXIT

### HOMEWORK

Planned homework modules will be critical. Printed homework sheets or even a homework practice book are an excellent method to ensure students have practice material.

### DIGITAL AID

Those schools in which students have access to digital learning tools at home could partner with ed-tech vendors aligned to their curriculum to ensure there is adequate material for home practice during off-hours. Other schools may want to explore SMS or messaging apps as a medium for interaction with students at home - homework may be assigned and assessed using these tools. One caveat here is that many students in government and affordable schools only have access to certain messaging apps only with extremely limited functionality.

### PARENT INVESTMENT

Teachers should build strong relationships with parents, as grading student work will be difficult with the increase in homework. Teachers could share grading rubrics with parents and selectively sample homework for grading.



Students, Teachers and Administrators will have to consider implementing behavioural norms as outlined below – Teachers and administrators will have to work towards normalising these new behaviours and setting a culture of respect for hygiene and safety.

## **Teachers and Students**



All students and teachers to wear a mask at all times



Teachers to ensure students sit in Zig-zag matrix pattern (or 6 feet apart) to maintain distance from each other



Teachers to ensure students wipe down their seat and desk every time they enter the classroom/ every few hours



Pedagogy should ensure that students collaborate with each other but at a distance

### Administration



Bell for students to wipe down their surrounding area every hour or two



Students to place their bags in a manner such that other students are not exposed to the bags.



In-class movement during class hours is to be minimized.



If possible, notes are to be taken on digital devices so they can be reviewed without physical contact.

ATTENDANCE	TRANSPORT	ENTRY	IN CLASS	BREAKS	EXTRAS	EXIT
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Due to reduced contact hours, the need for long breaks may be eliminated. However, as teachers are bound to deliver higher intensity classes with reduced contact hours, it may be worthwhile to consider short 5 minute breaks between periods to allow students to reset.

### **Teachers and Students**



Teachers and students should wash their hands/ use a hand sanitizer at regular intervals



A single break of 15 minutes common to all classes, where students eat at their desks

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Pairs of classes may be assigned one period where a 15-minute block may be utilized for going to the restroom



Hand wash areas and toilets should have child-friendly signage and instructions on good hygiene etiquette



A portable screen that students can carry can be used during lunch break as a sneeze guard while masks are not worn



Staggered breaks for restroom and stretching legs



ATTENDANCE TRANSPORT ENTRY IN CLASS BREAKS EXTRAS
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While extracurricular activities and labs form an important part of a student's development, in these challenging times it may be prudent for many schools to exclude such offerings as operational safety may be compromised due to many student coming in contact with common equipment. If these activities are to be continued, some guidelines are below.

## Administration



Extracurricular activities will have to be scheduled along with restroom-break time such that students are able to wash their hands before returning to class



Laboratories will have to have marked out areas for student work, where all students are 6 feet apart

### Teachers



Laboratory pedagogy that requires group work will have to be re-planned for independent work



Lab stations will have to be prepared with equipment so that students do not congregate in order to pick up equipment from common storage

## Students



Students will have to minimise movement during laboratory sessions, and ensure they are at designated student spots

## Sanitization Staff



All lab equipment will have to be disinfected after use

Exiting school is a process that naturally causes students to congregate – schools must stagger classes exiting school to ensure social distancing can be maintained. Exit processes must be properly defined and communicated to students, staff and parents to ensure compliance.



Schools usually shut/ restrict exit to one or a few gates -this practice should be avoided. All/As many as possible school access points should be open to students during peak hours to prevent crowding.



Administrative or Teaching staff may man extra open school access points during entry and exit to ensure a modicum of security.



All school buses should have staggered departure slots such that students are let out of school according to their bus number, and the next group of students exit only after the previous bus has departed.



All students not travelling by school bus are to be issued departure time-slots mapped to school access points (if the school has multiple gates). Schools to issue a survey prior to reopening to understand the needs of students carpooling/travelling with other students or staff.



All students travelling by personal transportation must exit their class at the designated time for their particular grade. Those travelling by bus will have to wait until the last class is complete.



## Guidelines

PARENTS

Parents/Guardians should try and impress upon their wards the importance of social distancing and hygiene in combating the COVID crisis. They are uniquely positioned to influence appropriate student behaviour to ensure compliance with new school operating procedures towards which many students may naturally find themselves naturally disinclined.



### ATTENDANCE

Parents must ensure the attendance decision checklist is used, and that their wards are attending school only when it is safe to do so.



### TRANSPORT

If students are using the school bus, parents should monitor the bus if possible for policy compliance and safe distancing. If travelling to school by personal transportation, parents must ensure vehicle hygiene and safety.



### SCHOOL ENTRY

Parents must try and ensure their wards reach school at the right gate, and at the assigned time if using personal transport.



### IN CLASS

Since teachers will rely on homework more than usual to keep pace with the curriculum while contact hours are reduced in class, it is essential that parents engage students at home with material and try and make sure students stay on track with their homework. Parents may be on-boarded to help with grading homework and assisting with homework tutoring.

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### EXIT

Parents/chauffeurs picking up students must be present at the appropriate gate at the right time to ensure smooth socially distanced exit from school. School bags should be tucked away such that contact with other family members is minimised.



## Guidelines SANITIZATION STAFF

A dedicated, driven sanitation staff will be absolutely critical to maintaining safety and hygiene. Every school must consider investing in increased sanitation staff and work towards procuring appropriate sanitization equipment in sufficient quantities.



**ATTENDANCE** Sanitization staff must be empowered to make attendance decisions based on their health.



### PROTECTION

Sanitization staff must be provided with personal protective equipment and appropriate consumables such as disinfectants and wipes.



### SCOPE OF WORK

Sanitizations staff must understand the increased scope of work beyond standard operations – such as wipe down techniques and key surfaces that need to be consistently cleaned. As far as possible, all surfaces that students and teachers come in contact with should be constantly wiped down with disinfectant. School buses may be wiped down at the end of the day.



### SENSITIZATION

Sanitization staff should be sensitized to the importance of continuous wipe downs in minimising COVID spread by explaining the mechanism of transmission.



### SCHEDULING

Sanitization routes through school corridors may be set up for sanitization staff with scheduled timings.



## Guidelines TEACHER WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT

With reduced contact hours, teachers and administrative staff exploring any option to engage students must take cognizance of the substantial increase in expectations from teachers – both on the personal development front, with the rapid adoptions of virtual learning, and on the student engagement front with lessons having to be repeated for smaller groups of students. Some strategies to manage teacher workload are outlined below.



### ADOPTION OF VIRTUAL LEARNING PLATFORMS

While virtual learning may not be ideal to replace the in-class experience, depending on the context technology can be leveraged to in various forms – from setting the stage for a flipped classroom through exhaustive online media, to using simple text based communication (SMS/messaging apps) for homework.



### ONBOARDING OF ASSISTANT TEACHERS

Schools could on-board junior staff to help teachers with administrative tasks such as corrections, data entry and record making and collation of notes.



### STUDENT ASSISTANTS

Teachers may nominate students to correct and grade each others work on rotational basis – this allows students to learn the skill of critical and fair assessment.



### LESSON PLAN POOLS

A common open-source database could be created with lesson plans shared among teachers across schools. This will help reduce the burden of lesson planning.



### FLEXIBLE ROTATION

Co-creating a rotation policy with all staff members will allow teachers to voice their opinions and preferences – allowing the school plan for the specific needs of its staff.



## CASE 1: Apple Public School.





Apple public school is a medium sized school serving grades 1-10. Grades 1-5 attend the primary school and 6-10 attend the secondary school. The school consists of 10 classrooms, each approximately 330 sft. with a total of 15 teachers (10 class teachers + 5 additional subject teachers) across primary and secondary grades. 360 students attend the school. The school is located in a dense urban area and there are no open fields that may be used for classes.

Upon evaluating the classrooms, it is found that the maximum safe capacity while ensuring each student is minimum of 6 ft from another when seated is 9 students. Therefore when the school reopens, it will have to operate at 25% of its standard operating capacity. The school will have to convert each of its grades into 4 sections and operate in 2 batches daily, with students attending one batch on alternate days. In order to ensure that students have appropriate furniture, each attending batch will have to comprise of students from both primary and secondary grades.

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## CASE 1: Apple Public School

Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays: Grades I, III, V, VII, IX



Grade	I.	V	VII	IX	Ш	V	VII	IX	
Section	A, B, C, D	А, В	A, B	A,B	A, B, C, D	C, D	C, D	C, D	
Hours	3.5	4	4	.5	3.5	4	4.5		
Students	36	18	3	6	36	18	36		
Entry Time	7:30 AM	7:15 AM	7:00	) AM	1:00 PM	12:45 PM	12: 30 PM		
Exit Time	11:00 AM	11:15 AM	11:30 AM		4:30 PM	4:45 PM	5:00 PM		

The school is split into two broader batches of grades 1,3,5,7 and 9 – expected to attend on Monday Wednesday and Friday either during the morning session or afternoon session. Entry and exit of each grade is staggered with secondary grades receiving maximum contact hours.



## CASE 1: Apple Public School

Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays: Grades II, IV, VI, VIII, X



Grade	II	VI	VIII	Х	IV	VI	VIII	Х	
Section	A, B, C, D	А, В	A, B	A,B	A, B, C, D	C, D	C, D	C, D	
Hours	3.5	4	4	.5	3.5	4	4.5		
Students	36	18	36		36	18	36		
Entry Time	7:30 AM	7:15 AM	7:00 AM		1:00 PM	12:45 PM	12: 30 PM		
Exit Time	11:00 AM	11:15 AM	11:30 AM		4:30 PM	4:45 PM	5:00 PM		

Similarly, the remaining grades (2,4,6,8 and 10) attend school on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday either during the morning or afternoon session with staggered entry and exit. Provided entry and exit times are limited to those arriving by personal transport. Those arriving by school bus, arrive at the scheduled bus time prior to the start of the first class and report directly to their classroom.



## CASE 2: Orange Public School.





Orange Public School is a large school serving grades 1-10. Grades 1-5 attend the primary school and 6-10 attend the secondary school. The school consists of 10 classrooms, each approximately 560 sft. with a total of 20 teachers (10 class teachers + 10 additional subject teachers) across primary and secondary grades. 320 students attend the school. The school is located in a dense urban area and there are no open fields that may be used for classes.

Upon evaluating the classrooms, it is found that the maximum safe capacity while ensuring each student is minimum of 6 ft from another when seated is 16 students. Therefore when the school reopens, it will have to operate at 50% of its standard operating capacity. The school will have to convert each of its grades into 2 sections. The school has the option to work full days and have students with grades attending on alternate days or conduct two school sessions everyday, with all students attending one of the sessions. The school chooses to operate 2 sessions daily, with students attending one of the batches. In order to ensure that students have appropriate furniture, each attending batch will have to comprise of students from both primary and secondary grades.



## CASE 2: Orange Public School

Daily, Morning Batch - All grades



Grade	I	П	Ш	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	Х
Section	А,		А		А,		А		А	
Hours	2.5		3		3.5		4		4.5	
Students	32		32		32		32		32	
Entry Time	8:00 AM		7:45 AM		7:30 AM		7:15 AM		7:00 AM	
Exit Time	10:30	MAC	10:4	10:45 AM 11:00 AM		11: 1	11: 15 AM		D AM	

In order to reduce the burden on teachers, each grade is split into 2 sections, with section A attending school during the morning session and section B attending school during the evening session. As there are 20 teachers, the teachers can be split into 2-3 rotations and do not have to attend from morning through to evening.



## CASE 2: Orange Public School

Daily, Afternoon Batch - All grades



Grade	I	Ш	Ш	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	Х
Section	В		В		В		В		В	
Hours	2.5		3		3.5		4		4.5	
Students	32		32		32		32		32	
Entry Time	1:30 AM		1:15 AM		1:00 PM		12:45 PM		12:30 PM	
Exit Time	me 4:00 AM		4:15 AM		4:30 AM		4:45 PM		5:00 PM	

In order to reduce the burden on teachers, each grade is split into 2 sections, with section A attending school during the morning session and section B attending school during the evening session. As there are 20 teachers, the teachers can be split into 2-3 rotations and do not have to attend from morning through to evening.



## Closing Notes<sup>1</sup>

While the pandemic has created an unprecedented challenge for humanity, it also offers a unique opportunity to re-imagine our schools. In the new way of life post-corona, we need to think afresh about the role of our schools. We can transform schools from being a mere implementers of directions from the directorate or district headquarters to having a central role in our society. And, it would be a historical blunder if we miss this opportunity by not entrusting our schools with a bigger and bolder role to prepare children for a better life and not just for lessons from their textbooks.

First, we need to assure every child, irrespective of age and social class, that they are important to us and all of them have an equal right to the physical and intellectual space of their respective schools. The clamour of online teaching or older children coming to school first and not the younger ones should be put to rest. Online teaching can only complement the learning in school, not replace it. Similarly, in being mindful of ensuring access with equity for all children, students of secondary grades should not be prioritised over primary-grade children. Learning at all stages is important.



Parents should be taken into confidence and should not be hurried or compelled to send their child to school. Further, the emphasis for children between three to 14 years should be on establishing the foundation of lifelong learning. The focus should exclusively be on the child's happiness, support for responsible behaviour (without preaching) and building foundational learning skills instead of just completing the remaining syllabus. The goal should be that our children "learn to learn". The only thing for which a teacher be held accountable is to ensure that every child stays connected with the school and enjoys the new teaching-learning format.



## Closing Notes<sup>2</sup>

Reopening schools will be the ultimate exercise in devil-concealing detail work. A recommendation like "put all student desks at least six feet apart" is easy to make, but it will take the people who actually know the configurations of rooms in the building to turn it into a workable plan.

Individual school plans will hinge on nitty-gritty details, not sweeping policy ideas. In a situation with few students walking to school, how do you get them to the building without stuffing them into a means of transportation?

Checking temperatures as students enter the building is bound to create a bottleneck and therefore a crowd – specific crowd control measures to maintain social distancing will be key, and individual schools will know the area surrounding their school best to predict crowding patterns.

How will students move from class to class? How does an elementary teacher move a line of fifteen kids, all six feet apart, through the halls? In a high school, how do you dismiss different classes at different times without a crowd forming somewhere? The many detail question are all very specific to location, to student bodies, to staff

What sorts of supplemental services will be needed, and which students are most likely to need them? How likely are local families to cooperate with health and safety measures, and how do you build trust with the community?

The above questions will require deep thought from school administrators and staff, but as many basic tenets of education are challenged by the pandemic, we may well emerge on the other side with a completely new education paradigm.





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