

Guidelines for Primary School Opening (short version)

Background

The impact of school disruptions includes physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural effects, which will vary depending on the age of the children. Where children have been inducted into child labour, bringing them back will pose additional challenges. The impact of school closure on learning will be widely variable across any given group of children. Children with special needs would have been impacted much more harshly, and need special programmes. Since children from different contexts will be impacted differently, strategies need to be developed appropriately. A standardized plan of work for all schools will be ineffective.

A significant proportion of children have not been regularly benefiting from any form of structured learning opportunities for the last one and a half years. During this period, the majority of them will not only not have progressed in their learning, but they are likely to have lost skills and knowledge that they knew, due to lack of practice, mentorship and guidance from teachers.

Children's academic, physical and cognitive development is critical for holistic growth and efforts have to be made to ensure both health and education go hand in hand at the school ecosystem.

This document provides guidelines for action amongst different actors in the education system, to work together to address the education emergency.

School and Teachers

The first and foremost priority is to welcome children to schools and to re-establish and strengthen the connection between the student and the teacher, as well as between students which requires time, space and an environment that is conducive for open interactions. Building this trust and connection is essential for socio-emotional development and academic learning. **Preparing children to learn is of utmost importance**; only then they will be able to absorb what is taught in the rest of the year. Re-engaging children with education and strengthening their "learning to learn" abilities, with the following approaches is vital. Each teacher will need to apply these ideas based on their unique contexts and learner needs.

1. Story-telling, songs, art, craft, games, sport and other group activities should be used extensively for children to learn/ re-learn communicating with one another, listening, collaborating, and expressing themselves. These need not be tied to specific Mathematics or Language learning outcomes, academic learning will come as children get adjusted to working with one another; arts and music can also be therapeutic expressions for young children
2. Plenty of outdoor activities and games should be included. The outdoor activities can be linked to the environment around the school and these will often give enough opportunities for numeracy and language skills to be integrated, specifically for children to communicate. Dedicate about a month's time entirely focusing on play and other activities to get children comfortable with the learning process, the school environment.
3. Allocate a period of '*open learning*' – where the focus is on helping children acquire/ re-acquire skills of learning in a formal environment, reorienting to tasks of learning, including completing given tasks, following through on instructions and staying on tasks in a focused manner

4. Classes could be conducted in mixed age/ mixed learning groups – where the lessons should be designed in such a way that children can work at their level (broad groups can be classes 1-3 and 4-5; sub-groups can be made based on children’s learning levels). The Nali Kali principles need to be extended to grades 4 and 5 as well.
5. Adequate materials should be available for children for self-practice. Eg. – story books, textbooks of different classes, TLMs, self directed worksheets, etc.
6. Assessments should be informal and formative – with opportunities for combining hands-on demonstrations of learning as well as oral and written assessments to identify the level of students.
7. A well-organized set of fundamental competencies that are foundational and core for every class, across all school subjects, should be identified and organized in a “learning ladder”. This can be used to begin teaching and to group children.

Some principles to identify the fundamental competencies:

- a. These should be the most basic or foundational ideas in a subject, for example, counting in mathematics, reading in language, etc.
 - b. These should form the stepping-stones for acquiring other competencies in higher classes, for example, unless a child can count, she may not be able to develop number sense. Similarly, unless a child is able to identify words, she will not be able to read full sentences.
 - c. The competencies should be graded and progressively organized in a learning ladder, varying in complexity across classes to help teachers address multi-level learners in their classrooms
8. Children can be grouped based on the competencies they have, which may vary by class and subject. For example, a child of, say, class IV, may be at level 1 in a particular content domain in a subject and at level 2 in another. As children progress in their learning, they can be re-assigned to different groups, and eventually grade level teaching can be resumed. Bypassing this process and proceeding to grade level competencies can lead to disengaged learners and dropouts.

An illustration of how to organize foundational competences for reading skills and numbers content domains from classes I to V is given in the following table:

Domain	Level 1 Competencies - mapped to class I & II syllabus	Level 2 Competencies- mapped to class III & IV syllabus	Level 3 Competencies- mapped to class V syllabus
Reading skills (Language)	1.1 Can recognize the letter of the alphabet- both in form and sound. 1.2 Can read the names of familiar objects commonly found in the	2.1 Can read short sentences, stories and poems. 2.2 Enjoys reading a variety of textual materials based on their interest and ability, such as pictures, posters, unfamiliar stories, poems,	3.1 Can read and comprehend textual materials beyond those suggested in the textbook, such as newspapers, hoardings, etc.

	textbooks.	etc.	
Numbers (Mathematics)	<p>1.1 Counts numbers up to 20 using concrete objects.</p> <p>1.2 Reads and writes numbers up to 99.</p> <p>1.3 Compares two-digit numbers up to 99 using their place value.</p> <p>1.4 Solves addition and subtraction of numbers up to 99 (without borrow/carry over) in daily life situations.</p>	<p>2.1 Reads and writes numbers up to 999 using place value.</p> <p>2.2 Compares number up to 999 using place value.</p> <p>2.3 Solves word problems of daily life based on appropriate number operations (addition and subtraction) using numbers up to 999.</p> <p>2.4 Applies multiplication operations of numbers till 10 in daily life</p> <p>2.5 Divides numbers through equal sharing/ regrouping.</p> <p>2.6 Identifies half, one-fourth, three-fourths of a whole in a given picture by paper folding and also in a collection of objects.</p>	<p>3.1 Reads and writes number greater than 1000 in daily life.</p> <p>3.2 Performs multiplication operation on numbers beyond 1000 by understanding of place value of numbers.</p> <p>3.3 Applies division in 3 digits numbers using algorithms.</p> <p>3.4 Estimates the answer of a problem related to the basic mathematical operations.</p> <p>3.4 Performs standard algorithm of basic mathematical operations (Addition, subtraction, multiplication, division) on number beyond 1000 in daily life situations.</p> <p>3.5 Represents the fraction in standard form for any part of a group.</p>

9. One teacher per classroom to be ensured. No unattended classrooms will be allowed. Teaching assistants/guest teachers / volunteers will be employed to meet the requirements
10. Locate absent or disengaged students, follow up and communicate individually with them to understand the reasons and any challenges they may be facing
11. Private schools must issue transfer certificates, without creating any problem and government schools will accept students from private schools even without transfer certificates
12. Socio-emotional support will be provided within schools. School will take the initiative to link families with child health services, including mental health services
13. Communication with parents: periodic messages to be sent from class teacher to parents about the schools work, update them on the progress and status and also share expectations for parents participation in the students learning activities. Inexpensive voice broadcasting system (IVRS, Whatsapp, etc.) can be used.
14. Organize monthly meeting with parents in school or in the community, at a time convenient to parents, to strengthen school-parent relationship and enhance community participation in the school's activities.

15. Time to be allocated in the weekly school schedule for feedback, discussion and planning instructions for the following week

Curriculum and Pedagogy:

The primary areas of focus should be language learning and mathematical competences which will enable children to make progress across multiple subjects. This means adjustment of the timetable to give adequate time for these curricular areas. Further, language learning and mathematical reasoning and application should be reinforced across all subject areas and academic teaching should be such that it promotes socio-emotional learning.

Socio-Emotional Learning:

Children will have experienced a variety of losses during the pandemic. These include direct loss of lives of family members, critical illnesses, the loss of livelihood and possibly uprooting of their homes. Many poor children have been forced to take up work to support their families. Remote learning, even where it occurred, could not foster the social development that comes with being part of the school community. During this time, it is likely that there might have been an absence or lack of opportunities for children to share any anxieties, thoughts of uncertainty or feel a sense of community. Adversities such as these and the loss of positive relationships impact child development and the ability to learn. Socio-emotional development is required to enable academic learning, through cooperative learning, self-regulation, focus and attention. Teachers have to invest deliberately on getting students used to routine, concentration and interacting with others. There would be a need to rebuild the gap of children's relationship with the school and the school community – teachers, friends, facilitators.

1. Special time in the school day can be set aside for activities promoting SEL. Integration of socio-emotional learning across the subject areas enables children to acquire these competences in authentic settings. For instance, in mathematics, students can interact with others to listen to different approaches to solving a problem; enable students to recognize frustration with a problem, manage the frustration and persist in solving the problem, and empower students to self-monitor and reflect on understanding of concepts. These strategies should be deliberately and consistently used as part of the instruction process.
2. Short exercises like stretches and warm-ups can be done to lighten and open-up before any other activity is planned. They can also be used as energizers at different points of time.
3. Storytelling, crafts, group bonding exercises, listening, talking and sharing exercises are activities that can be done regularly
4. It would be good to document and record some activities, have some pictures and preserve the responses in the form of art and writing that children create. Some of these can also be displayed at the school in the week that they are created so everyone gets a chance to engage with what happened and stay with it for sometimes. Later children can also be encouraged to take these home.
5. Activities where children are encouraged to share their thoughts and have conversations should be done to bring out their experiences and create an expressive environment

6. Welcome circle, circle time for Math and language, activity corners with blocks/colouring that children can engage in independently as and when they please are some strategies that can be incorporated in the classroom

Language and Literacy:

The learning loss in the area of language could be due to a variety of reasons including:

1. loss of language competencies acquired due to lack of opportunities to practice the skill and delays in the acquisition of new skills due to lack of inputs
2. emotional and psychological stresses in the child's life due to the pandemic

Recommendations for language instruction to build foundational literacy skills:

1. For all grades, designate specific, extended time of 120 min for literacy instruction over the school day. Uninterrupted time for making progress in reading is especially important as students return to structured learning.
2. Some groups of children may need additional learning time, after school hours or on weekends. This additional learning time should be focused on students' specific skill needs and misunderstandings.
3. Create an immersive language environment (home language), integrating arts, stories and games. Where possible, outdoor activities around the local ecology to be integrated within the curriculum for language learning
4. The focus of language classrooms when children come back to school should be to provide a safe place for dialogue and to foster opportunities to cooperate and collaborate.
5. Stories will be an excellent starting point for all age groups. Carefully selected stories can be used for children to make links to what is happening around them - their lived reality. Stories have the ability to create dialogue and discussions which in-turn can be used to provide much-needed emotional support
6. Children can engage in exploration activities in safe environments outside the classroom, for example looking at trees, flowers, leaves, insects, birds etc., Specific language activities should be given based on their exploration. Learning in context will require children to use richer language to include all the complexities that they observe.
7. Provide adequate opportunities for children to share their past experiences. This will help teachers in understanding the learners thereby providing valuable inputs for lesson planning.
8. Children may have a lot of questions lingering in their minds about the way world changed around them. Space to ask questions and discuss about matters that concern them will also develop their language abilities

In addition to the above activities, classes 4 and 5 can also engage in the following:

9. Exposure to a variety of texts – books of different genres to satiate the needs of different levels of learners will be essential. Children may need help in recognising letters and may need to start from the basics.
10. Group work and use of diverse resources to support reading will be crucial.

11. Children should engage in purposeful writing. This can be achieved through extension of stories, writing original stories, observations and their experiences etc. Some children may need help from teachers/volunteers to note down their thoughts and observations. Providing adequate support and engaging children in writing with a purpose is essential.

Mathematics:

The learning loss in mathematics could be due to a variety of reasons including:

1. lack of opportunities to practice the skill as well as acquire new skills
2. lack of conceptual understanding and sufficient mastery of the skill in the first place
3. loss of language skills
4. emotional and psychological stresses in the child's life due to the pandemic

It is important to introduce maths in embedded ways – in contexts that children can relate to.

Communicating with mathematics – helping children acquire the language of mathematics as well as become comfortable using natural language to acquire mathematics is very important.

Recommendations for mathematics instruction to build foundational numeracy skills:

1. There should be a focus on building comfort and confidence in mathematics, conveying that math is relevant and that everyone can learn mathematics
2. Focus on building/ rebuilding math learning – through a combination of hands-on activities, self-directed learning materials. Stories, outdoor activities and games can be integrated within the curriculum for math teaching
3. Depth of instruction about key concepts that are essential to children's mathematical understanding and reasoning, is more important than the pace. The focus should not be on the chapters of the textbook; it should be on the concepts that need to be taught or reinforced
4. Focus to be laid on developing number sense, spatial sense and introducing algebraic thinking (generalization).
5. Use a gradual sequential approach progressing from concrete (using real objects like sticks, stones) to representational (using pictorial representations like tally marks, dots) to abstract (using symbolic representation like number, operator symbols) in teaching concepts
6. Use TLMs like ganit mala, dienes blocks, counters, etc which provide opportunities for children to make meaning of abstract concepts in math in concrete ways and can help build conceptual understanding in children. Everyday materials like sticks and stones that are inexpensive or freely available or do-it-yourself materials that serve the purpose can also be used
7. Integrate physical movement and games in the teaching learning process. Eg – kunte bille, chowka baara
8. Outdoor activities can be useful for estimation/ comparison/ data analysis and organization
9. A combination of individual and peer learning strategies should be used. Group activities can promote collaboration skills and relationship building and enable peer learning.

DIET/BRC/CRC:

DIETs, BRCs and CRCs will play a major role in resuming and renewing education, especially in helping to design and implement a restructured curriculum. Recommendations for DIETs, BRCs and CRCs to support schools, teachers and student learning:

1. Provide clear guidance to principals and teachers about school opening/closures and how to communicate them to students, including how classes will be organized during school closures and how they will be supported (based on these guidelines)
2. Learning time will need to be extended either by increasing the number of hours in a school day, reducing/re-purposing holidays or by adding more school days to the academic year
3. Summative, high stakes examinations should be actively discouraged and de-emphasized
4. Communicate the instructional priorities for teachers – what should be taught within major areas of the curriculum at each grade level. Teachers and school principals need to know what competences to focus on, what areas can be cut or minimized.
5. Selected DIET / BRC / CRC faculty, after training, should serve as teacher mentors and help to train additional teacher mentors to support teachers with the modified curriculum approach , pedagogical methods, and to discuss feedback and monitor progress. Faculty capacity building must be planned for facilitating this.
6. Regular teacher support through coaching and mentoring: Teachers require empathetic, regular, on-going support, not one-off training, to address the diversity of teaching-learning situations they will face in the classroom. Organize monthly cluster level meetings with teachers for clarification of doubts through discussions, demonstrations and peer interaction. CRP capacity building program to provide teacher support must be planned
7. Communication with teachers and HMs must be **empathetic and supportive**, recognizing the tough job that teachers are undertaking. Punitive monitoring, fault finding and punishment will strongly discourage openness amongst teachers, who will tend to focus on formal compliance with government orders, rather than improving student learning. Top down messaging such as questioning about syllabus completion, and record keeping must be consciously avoided at all levels.
8. Provide regular academic support to teachers to address their instructional needs and reduce bureaucratic demands on their time. Assigning administrative tasks, collecting data that will not be used for any analysis or for further decisions must be avoided.
9. When visiting schools, do not be distrustful of teachers and their work. Provide positive reinforcement and support, reassuring them that “we understand the difficulty you are in and that we are with you”
10. Cluster and Block Resource Centers should be well equipped with teaching-learning material to be easily accessed, used and borrowed if necessary by teachers
11. Many resources developed for different programs and initiatives such as Oodu Karnataka, DSERT worksheets, material developed by teachers and NGOs during the pandemic, etc., should be carefully selected, curated and be brought together in one repository for easy access by teachers and also made available in print form in DIETs, BRCs and CRCs.

12. Information on what materials are available, where, and how teachers can access and use them should be widely disseminated to help teachers equip themselves with a flexible repertoire of approaches and resources to respond to children at different levels.
13. Cluster level (Primary) and Block level (Secondary) teachers phone communities / groups must be created if not existing. These should be used not only for information dissemination from state and district authorities, but also for sharing of experiences, resources and ideas amongst teachers. These should function as informal and friendly peer groups rather than only formal groups for dissemination of official messages
14. Assist teachers with templates for communication with parents (broadcast messages, written, etc.)
15. Compile a compendium of resources that were developed by teachers and NGOs during the pandemic to support students at home. Schools can share them with parents, as part of the communication outreach.
16. Appoint teaching assistants, consisting of recent college graduates or even those who are currently studying, educated youth volunteers from the community to assist teachers in using new teaching strategies and/or extending learning time, as well as to cope with the possible influx of students from private schools. Additional teachers or teaching aides must have adequate content knowledge
17. Engage local educated youth to facilitate community learning centers where they can meet every day/specific days of the week to provide educational support to students
18. Hold meetings every weekend with teachers, students, parents and members of the community to discuss about the educational needs and progress of the children of the community so that a sense of collective responsibility and care is developed and can aid in improved learning of the children

Education Department/Administrators:

1. The learning time will need to be increased by extending hours in a school day, reducing holidays or by adding more schooling days to the academic calendar in order to make up for all the lost time and help students get into regular practice.
2. Teachers should have the autonomy to design their lessons according to the children's learning needs and not be pressurized at all to "complete" the syllabus.
3. There should be a continuous process of identifying children who are out-of-school and ensuring that they are brought back to schools. Household census should be conducted at the village/block level to identify every child of school-going age, whether and where they are currently enrolled, and if not enrolled, the reasons for not enrolling
4. Back to school campaigns should be organized involving panchayats, local governments, teachers and principals, until every child is brought back to school
5. Mid day meal program to be resumed in schools regardless of school re-opening status. The nutritional value of the meal should be increased by adding high protein food items, such as eggs

(or chikki/protein bar for children who do not eat eggs). Milk distribution in the morning (Ksheera Bhagya program) to be resumed

6. Focus on tracking implementation of mid-day meals, child health services, sanitation and cleanliness of school premises to ensure health and safety
7. Schools with large numbers of students who have been deprived of learning during the pandemic, and schools that are receiving private school students, should also receive priority allocations of teachers in order to reduce class sizes and have manageable groups for instruction. This requires planning at the block level. Teaching Assistants (who have completed their B.Ed. Or D.Ed.) should be employed by schools as required, using untied special Covid school grants.
8. Aggregate/ estimate teacher requirements and teacher re-allocation requirements between schools, as well as requirements for teaching assistants and community volunteers
9. Additional spending over several years is necessary, especially in government schools to take in the large numbers of private school students as well as the nutritional, health and pedagogical measures. The increased spending should not focus only on sanitation and health measures. The bulk of the enhanced allocations should reach the schools to support enhanced learning. Additional financial allocations must also be allowed to be spent easily, together with appropriate controls and oversight, for instance, through untied grants.
10. Broad categories of additional expenses
 - Sanitation, repair and health and enhanced nutrition measures in school
 - Communication materials for parents and teachers
 - Untied grants for schools to meet local expenses for their instructional plans
 - Additional learning materials (graded readers, puzzles, games etc) for restructured curriculum / Teacher guides on the restructured curriculum
 - Assessment tools
 - Teacher support – training together with coaching/mentorship
 - Additional teaching resources – teacher aides, retired teachers etc
 - Extra learning time costs
 - District / Block / Cluster level management expenses
11. Counselling resources for teachers and children should be available at the school/ cluster level
12. The role of BRC, CRC in data collection and other administrative tasks should be reviewed and reduced. Only data which is important for assessing meaningful progress and for critical decision-making (for instance, to allocate more resources for particular tasks) should be prioritized.
13. Coordinating with local governments – panchayat at village, taluka and district level – to support implementation of the education recovery plan, for example to provide additional funds, materials, hire additional teachers and mobilize and deploy volunteers. Panchayats will also need to coordinate with Health and Family Welfare, Women and Child Development departments to connect students and teachers to related services.