

UNICEF Education COVID-19 Case Study

China – Supporting the school reopening for 241 million children

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China was the first country to face the COVID-19 pandemic. To mitigate the effects of the crisis, the country postponed the start of the new school term usually scheduled for mid-February. The extended closure of over 600,000 kindergartens and schools (including teaching sites) and strict quarantine abruptly changed the lives of over 241 million children in the country. To minimize the disruption and ensure the continuity of learning, the government quickly moved to launch the 'Home Study Initiative' [establishing distance learning, primarily through online and TV programming](#). In March, schools started to gradually reopen in a few provinces, with the majority of provinces following suit by May. UNICEF supported the reopening efforts with a comprehensive 'Safe School' communication campaign developed in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

KEY FEATURES

- **Leveraging evidence for programming** – To inform decision making and create evidence-based messages, a rapid assessment was conducted to understand the knowledge, awareness and concerns of children, adolescents, parents and teachers on school reopening. The assessment reached more than 18,000 children and youth, more than 27,000 parents and almost 5,000 teachers, and highlighted widespread concerns and stress around school reopening, safety and learning.
- **Addressing mental health and wellbeing** – Responding to the negative impact of COVID-19 and the prolonged quarantine on the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth, [UNICEF developed mental health messages and resources](#). For the nationwide safe school campaign, UNICEF prominently included key messages on anti-stigma and bullying as well as psychosocial support to address the concerns and stress children and youth face around school reopening.
- **Complementing the government and adding value** – In the context of a strong government response, UNICEF Education team coordinated closely with the MOE to maximize the complementarity and value-add of UNICEF's programming. UNICEF's advocacy and messaging on psychosocial support and mental health complemented the health-focused safe school reopening process of the MOE and local education bureaus to ensure not only health

and safety, but also a welcoming and child-friendly school environment for all children as schools reopen. The videos were dubbed in sign language and braille posters were developed as well to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

- **Targeting the right audience by partnering with the government** – UNICEF’s well-established relationship with MOE ensured the prioritization of the safe school campaign across relevant departments. UNICEF utilized government channels for the communication campaign to reach 241 million children and their parents/caregivers and teachers with [safe school messages](#).
- **Prioritizing inter-sectoral programming** – Early in the school reopening planning, UNICEF established a back-to-school working group led by the Deputy Representative with focal points from education, health, child protection, gender, communications, and monitoring & evaluation to ensure a holistic campaign, thereby leveraging UNICEF’s unique inter-sectoral and thematic expertise.
- **Building in an innovative monitoring system** – To collect feedback and improve the communication messages and materials, UNICEF built innovative monitoring and evaluation approaches into the communication campaign. All posters and videos include QR codes/links to a short survey with simple questions to gather audience feedback and emerging needs. So far, more than 60,000 respondents have provided evidence on the positive impact of the campaign on children, teachers and parents and ensured its continuous improvement.

EMERGENT LESSONS LEARNED

- **Creating high-level commitment** – UNICEF’s high-level support and commitment to China’s school re-opening process was two-fold: on a political level, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and UNICEF China Representative’s high-level communication with the MOE ensured high-level advocacy and commitment to UNICEF’s role in the school reopening process. On an operational level, under the leadership of the Deputy Representative’s back-to-school working group underscored the importance and priority of school reopening within the office and across sectors. As a result of this high-level commitment, UNICEF successfully advanced a large-scale digital school reopening campaign in only one month.
- **Providing support at scale** – UNICEF maximized the potential and reach of the school reopening by sharing messages through a number of popular social media platforms including WeChat, Weibo and Douyin (TikTok). Through multiple campaigns, UNICEF reached over 62 million users across channels by June, and government communication channels further amplified the messages. The UNICEF hashtag #backtoschoolsafely# was viewed over 130 million times.
- **Leveraging government systems for programme delivery** – Through the close collaboration with MOE, UNICEF, in addition to the digital resources, was able to provide printed posters to the government’s distribution of supplies for school reopening. The supplies are expected to reach more than 600,000 kindergartens and schools (including teaching sites) across the country benefitting more than 241 million children. The provision of printed materials with key information and tips on the safe, healthy and happy return to schools would ensure that the most disadvantaged and marginalized children were reached.

OTHER RESOURCES

- For other resources, including more case studies, please click [here](#) and filter by “Area of Work” (Education).