

# UNICEF Education COVID-19 Case Study

China – Leveraging UNICEF’s multisectoral expertise for school reopening

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China was the first country to face the COVID-19 pandemic. All schools were closed on 17 February 2020 to protect students and teachers and contain its spread, affecting more than 241 million learners. School reopening started gradually in March 2020 until all schools were reopened by September 2020. [The extended closure of over 520,000 kindergartens and schools and strict quarantine abruptly changed the lives of over 241 million children in the country. Schools started to gradually reopen in March 2020, and then reached full reopening in September.](#) Since that time, China has managed to keep schools safely operating with very few precautionary school closures.

This case study examines the key results and lessons learned of a multisectoral effort involving education, health, water and sanitation, child protection, gender, communication and monitoring & evaluation to provide information on safe school reopening and operations to 241 million students, as well as their teachers and parents throughout the country.

## RESULTS

- **Establishment of a multisectoral Working Group for an integrated approach** – 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 leverage UNICEF’s unique multisectoral expertise. Members met very frequently – sometimes more than once a day and via chat – and benefited from a dedicated Coordinator. The inclusion of real-time monitoring & evaluation data ensured continuous adaptation and fine-tuning of the Back-to-school campaign. The [key messages and communication materials for the campaign](#) reflect an integrated approach and include all relevant aspects of UNICEF programming.

- **Leveraging multiple partners and communication channels for national reach** – For its Back-to-school communication campaign, UNICEF leveraged multiple complementary information channels, including its own social media platforms, government online portals and outreach to popular influencers. UNICEF also developed and distributed child-friendly printed materials to all 520,000 schools.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- **Creating high-level commitment** – UNICEF’s high-level support and commitment to China’s school re-opening process was two-fold: UNICEF engaged with the leadership of the ministry to agree on the campaign, where UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and UNICEF China Representative’s letter to the Ministry of Education cemented UNICEF’s central role in the school reopening process and facilitated the participation and collaboration of government agencies in the back-to-school effort. On an operational level, the leadership of the Deputy Representative in the Back-to-school Working Group underscored the importance of integrated school reopening within UNICEF programming. As a result, UNICEF was able to collaborate with the Government to implement a large-scale school reopening campaign in only one month.
- **Making teamwork work** – The COVID-19 pandemic and Back-to-school campaign meant venturing into uncharted terrain for UNICEF China, requiring unparalleled teamwork. The Deputy Representative ensured the Working Group’s ability to mobilize resources and accelerate decisions. Mutual trust and respect for individual teams’ sectoral expertise underpinned the ability of the Working Group to pull together towards the common goal of integrated school reopening.
- **Drawing on UNICEF’s multisectoral expertise** – Bringing UNICEF’s technical sectors together around a common goal ensured an integrated Back-to-school campaign and messaging, maximizing its impact. The leveraging of UNICEF’s social media channels, Government online portals and outreach through influencers broadened the reach and impact of UNICEF’s messages far beyond its usual audience.
- **Preparing to respond early** – UNICEF initiated planning for the Back-to-school campaign immediately after the closure of schools. The early planning facilitated coordination and collaboration across multiple sectors and government agencies and ensured a quality campaign reaching all schools and all learners across the country.

### Cost effectiveness

UNICEF’s investment in the country’s COVID-19 response is approximately US \$130,000 to date, including valued contributions from thematic funds and UNICEF China’s fundraising pool. The reach was national, benefitting all 241 million students.

## NEXT STEPS

The experience of school closures and distance learning resulted in a change of mindset and teachers continue to use technology to support teaching and learning. UNICEF is currently exploring strategies and approaches to support the strengthening of teachers’ ICT capacity.

## OTHER RESOURCES

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

For more information, please contact:

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