



Summary of: *Global Variation in COVID-19 School Reopening Measures*, by Patricia Bromley, Kate Steed Hoffman, Ritu Khanna, Laura Wentworth, and Christine Min Wotipka.

Research Brief October 2020

This brief summarizes the manuscript, *Global Variation in COVID-19 School Reopening Measures*.¹ The manuscript reports on findings from a systemic content analysis of documents in a new Stanford University database of international school reopening measures. The purpose of the database is to support school district leaders' decisions about options to consider when reopening schools during the continuing pandemic.

The measures were collected from 49 countries with documented school closures due to COVID-19 that reopened by July 2020. The documents, collected between March 2020 and July 15, 2020, included: 10 research organization reports; 35 primary-source country policy documents; and 60 media reports.

Findings

The content analysis produced 243 distinct school or classroom reopening measures grouped into nine overarching themes. To look at variation across counties, the themes were analyzed across country income groups: high income versus middle/low income².

- **Five themes, categorized as *Basic Measures*, made up the vast majority (86 percent) of measures, with *Physical distancing* being the most commonly observed. The themes included, in this order:**
 1. Physical distancing (87 measures) *This is the most commonly observed, likely due to recent epidemiological research suggesting that physical distance is highly effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19 (Chu et al. 2020).*
 2. Hygiene/cleaning (41 measures)
 3. Health screening prior to returning to school (37 measures)
 4. Altered school schedules or operations (25 measure)
 5. Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)/physical barriers (18 measures)
- **Four themes, categorized as *Extended Measures*, made up the remaining (14 percent) of measures. These included, in this order:**
 6. Information dissemination (10 measures)
 7. Student social and emotional health (9 measures)
 8. Teacher support and training (8 measures)
 9. General health (6 measures)
- **High income countries reported, on average, significantly more *Basic Measures* within each theme.**
 - High income countries reported, on average, eight of the 87 physical distancing measures, four of the 41 hygiene/cleaning measures, and two of the 25 school schedule/operations measures.
 - Low/middle income countries reported, on average, two of the hygiene/cleaning measures, four of the physical distancing measures, and one school/schedule operation measure.

¹ Bromley, P., Steed Hoffman, K., Khanna, R., Wentworth, L., & Min Wotipka, C. (2020). *Global Variation in COVID-19 School Reopening Measures*. Working paper, Stanford Graduate School of Education.

² Country income groups are based on the World Bank categories for 2020-2010 where “High Income” means a Gross National Income per capita of over 12,535 current USD (see <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-world-bank-country-classifications-income-level-2020-2021>).

- *Extended Measures* were discussed less frequently than *Basic Measures* across country income groups.

Implications for the San Francisco Unified School District

The authors assert that researchers, policy-makers and practitioners work together to develop systems for longer-term evaluation of back-to-school measures within the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors note that this study provides important short-term information for practitioners and policy-makers developing back-to-school plans and serves as the foundation for future research.

- The study does not track measures after July 15, 2020 and does not include information about school re-closings due to COVID-19 pandemic conditions.
- Differences among country policies draw attention to the need for better definitions of measures and additional research to study their effectiveness.

The authors emphasize that the *prevalence of a mention of a measure does not necessarily mean the measure is effective*. For example, an earlier analysis of these documents³ differentiated physical distancing measures between high and low policy agreements across countries. Within the *physical distancing category*, there was higher policy agreement on smaller class sizes, greater spacing of desks, and greater use of outdoor space and lower policy agreement on altering entry/exit times to stagger classes, minimizing student movement between classes, and restricting some spaces (e.g. no cafeteria). There was low policy agreement on all measures within the *Delivery of instruction/content; Assessment of learning* category.

- Additional research is needed related to *Extended Measures* such as on-line instruction and student well-being along with two measures that are critically important but did not fit into existing themes - collaboration with local authorities and monitoring mechanisms.
- The findings highlight differences between the number of measures used in high and low/middle income countries. Future research can examine the relationship between COVID-19 school reopenings and income equality more generally.

³ Bromley, P., Min Wotipka, C., & Wentworth, L. (2020). *School and Classroom Designs During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Presented to the San Francisco Unified School District, June 2020.