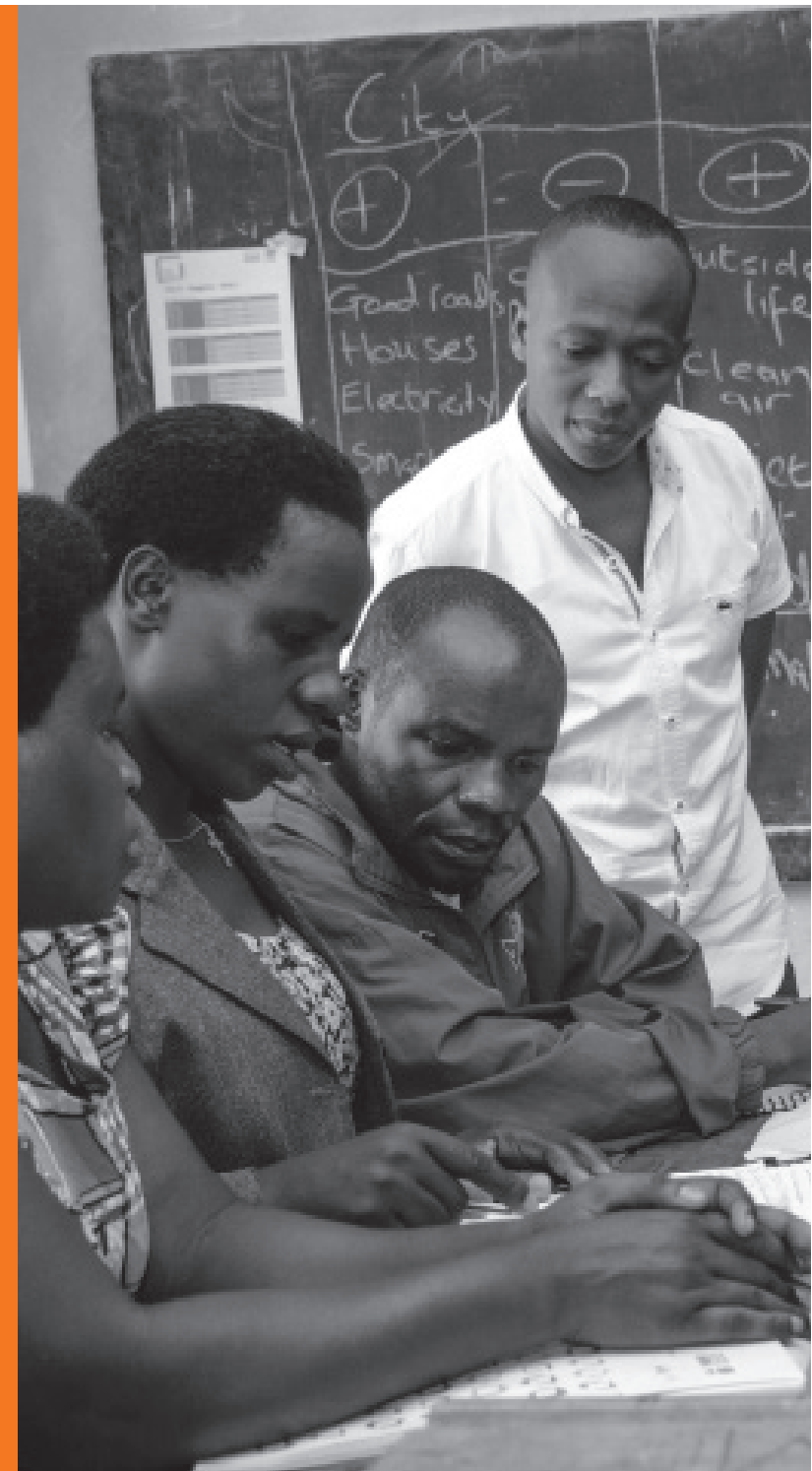# RWANDA LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

INSIGHTS ON SCHOOL AND SYSTEM LEADERSHIP DURING COVID-19

WISE

مؤسسة قطر
Qatar Foundation
إطلاق قدرات الإنسان Unlocking human potential

RWANDA LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

INSIGHTS ON SCHOOL AND
SYSTEM LEADERSHIP DURING COVID-19

A learning partnership between the Education Commission, Education Development Trust, the Rwanda Basic Education Board, and WISE, to generate new evidence on promising leadership responses during and post COVID-19.

SEPTEMBER 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT US

The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) was established by Qatar Foundation in 2009 under the leadership of its Chairperson, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

WISE is an international, multi-sectoral platform for creative, evidence-based thinking, debate, and purposeful action toward building the future of education. Through the biennial summit, collaborative research and a range of on-going programs, WISE is a global reference in new approaches to education.

The WISE Research series, produced in collaboration with experts from around the world, addresses key education issues that are globally relevant and reflect the priorities of the Qatar National Research Strategy. Presenting the latest knowledge, these comprehensive reports examine a range of education challenges faced in diverse contexts around the globe, offering action-oriented recommendations and policy guidance for all education stakeholders. Past WISE Research publications have addressed a wide range of issues including access, quality, financing, teacher training and motivation, school systems leadership, education in conflict areas, entrepreneurship, early-childhood education, twenty-first century skills, design thinking, and apprenticeship, among others.

The Education Commission is a global initiative encouraging greater progress on United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensuring inclusive and quality education and promoting lifelong learning for all.

The Commission is helping to create a pathway for reform and increased investment in education by mobilizing strong evidence and analysis while engaging with world leaders, policymakers, and researchers. The Commission is chaired by United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown, and supported by 26 high-level Commissioners.

The **Education Workforce Initiative (EWI),** part of the Education Commission, brings fresh thinking to the education workforce by drawing on the latest research and evidence to propose new ways to approach workforce design and implementation for more inclusive, quality education. EWI's flagship report, Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation, provides concrete examples of how successful education workforce reform and innovation have been implemented across the globe and puts forward three new visions for strengthening and reimagining the education workforce needed for today and the future.

ABOUT US

Education Development Trust

Education Development Trust is an international not-for-profit organisation working to improve education outcomes around the world. We seek to improve education – and transitions into work – through expert research on what works, and delivering highly contextualised programmes designed to transform education systems, schools and lives.

Our evidence-informed model for school improvement places schools at the heart of the communities they serve, acting as hubs for high-quality teaching and learning. We have a track record of transforming learning outcomes across contexts including the United Kingdom, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South East Asia. In **Rwanda**, we deliver **Building Learning Foundations** in partnership with the Rwanda Basic Education Board, supporting school leaders to develop their practice through peer collaboration and coaching. We have seen gains in school leaders' instructional leadership skills, with 66 percent meeting benchmark competencies in 2020, compared to 41 percent in 2018.

Education Development Trust offers a range of innovative approaches to help policymakers create a fundamental, system-wide shift in the way leadership is defined, developed, and sustained. The **learning partnership** approach is one of Education Development Trust's key innovations to ensure that research and evidence leads to policy and action. It consists of three stages in the research process: co-designing, data gathering and reflection, and influencing decision-making. The learning partnership approach has been critical to this and others research projects in ensuring real-time impact.

REB | RWANDA BASIC EDUCATION BOARD

The Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) is the implementation agency for Rwanda's Ministry of Education (MINEDUC).

It aims at promoting the quality of education through curriculum development, development and management of teachers, learning assessment, and the use of ICT in education. Since 2010, REB has coordinated the implementation of education policies related to school leadership, teacher capacity development, teaching and learning material development, and integration of ICT in cycles of Rwanda Basic Education, including pre-primary, primary, secondary and Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). REB works with the MINEDUC to build a more resilient education system in Rwanda.

In the last decade, REB has achieved several milestones such as the introduction of the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in cycles of basic education, implementation of a fee-free 12-year basic education, integration of ICT in the teaching and learning process, development of learning and assessment standards, and establishment of in-house textbook writing. In response to COVID-19, REB has worked with its development partners to implement the 'COVID-19 Education Response Plan', which included revamping online teaching and learning, digitizing teaching and learning materials, introducing the remedial and classroom catch-up activities, distribution of laptops and smart phones to teachers and school leaders, and implementing radio and TV lessons, among other initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH, RATIONALE AND THE RWANDAN CONTEXT

A 'LEARNING PARTNERSHIP' APPROACH

WISE, the Education Commission, and Education Development Trust came together with the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) to generate new evidence on school and system leadership during COVID-19.

This research used an innovative **'learning partnership'** approach with Rwandan education stakeholders engaged as a critical 'co-creation' partner in each phase of the process – from designing the research questions to intrepeting the findings.

This approach ensured the issues investigated were priorities for local stakeholders and promoted **ongoing, dynamic dialogue around emerging findings to influence decision-making** which could be acted on to create impact.

> This research 'helped set the vision for school leadership – the role needs to change, by supporting parents, supporting learners in difficult moments. This project gives us a new orientation, new content to train our school leaders.'
>
> **LEON N. MUGENZI,** Head of Department for Teacher Development and Management and Career Guidance and Counseling Dept, REB

Senior members of the REB and Ministry of Education met to discuss the research and consider the implications for policy. They committed to review and update leadership standards and continuous professional development plans in light of the findings and agreed on the need to clarify leaders' responsibilities for the wellbeing of teachers and learners, and to formalize the role of school leaders in relation to parental engagement in student learning and wellbeing.

WHY WE NEED EVIDENCE ON THE VALUE OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP DURING COVID-19

Evidence shows that school leadership has a significant influence on the quality of teaching and learning and is crucial in the health and success of schools and systems (Leithwood et al., 2019).

Research suggests that school leaders are most effective when they have sufficient autonomy and support in decision-making (Pont et al., 2008); dedicate time to instructional leadership (UNESCO, 2016); support a culture of teacher learning and motivation (Leithwood et al., 2008); and create a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008).

Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, **policymakers had identified school leadership as a key priority in tackling school quality and improvement challenges** worldwide (Robinson, 2008; Vaillant, 2014; Okoko, 2020).

However, **significant gaps in the evidence for effective leadership persist**, particularly in low-income contexts where the learning crisis is most acute (Sampat et al., 2020).

The challenge to 'build back better' after the crisis offers a great opportunity for new thinking on school leadership and its role in addressing the world's toughest educational challenges – including supporting the ongoing response to COVID-19.

THE RWANDAN CONTEXT

Prior to this research, Rwanda already had a strong commitment to improving school leadership and embedding collaborative structures to implement change:

• **A School Leadership and Management Unit (SLMU)** was created within the Teacher Development and Management and Career Guidance and Counselling Department at Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB).

• **A continuous professional development diploma course in effective school leadership** was developed to help equip headteachers and deputy headteachers with competences to be successful.

• **A system of coaching and professional learning communities** was established to complement in-service training and build a national and local cadre of leaders of learning who can support headteachers.

Rwanda developed a strong national education response to COVID-19:

• During school closures, the government embarked on a **national classroom-building project in every school** which required a huge effort from communities, with many groups supporting classroom building, including the police, army and the local community.

• School kitchens were constructed in all schools to implement a school feeding program at all education levels.

• To prepare for reopening, the government aimed to **recruit 24,000 teachers and planned for schools to start one hour early to support vulnerable learners** who were identified as experiencing substantial learning loss.

• **Health officials worked with schools** to implement plans to ensure safe reopening. The **health and safeguarding referral system was strengthened,** with new guidelines developed for teachers.

A LEARNING PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

DETAILS OF THE APPROACH, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY
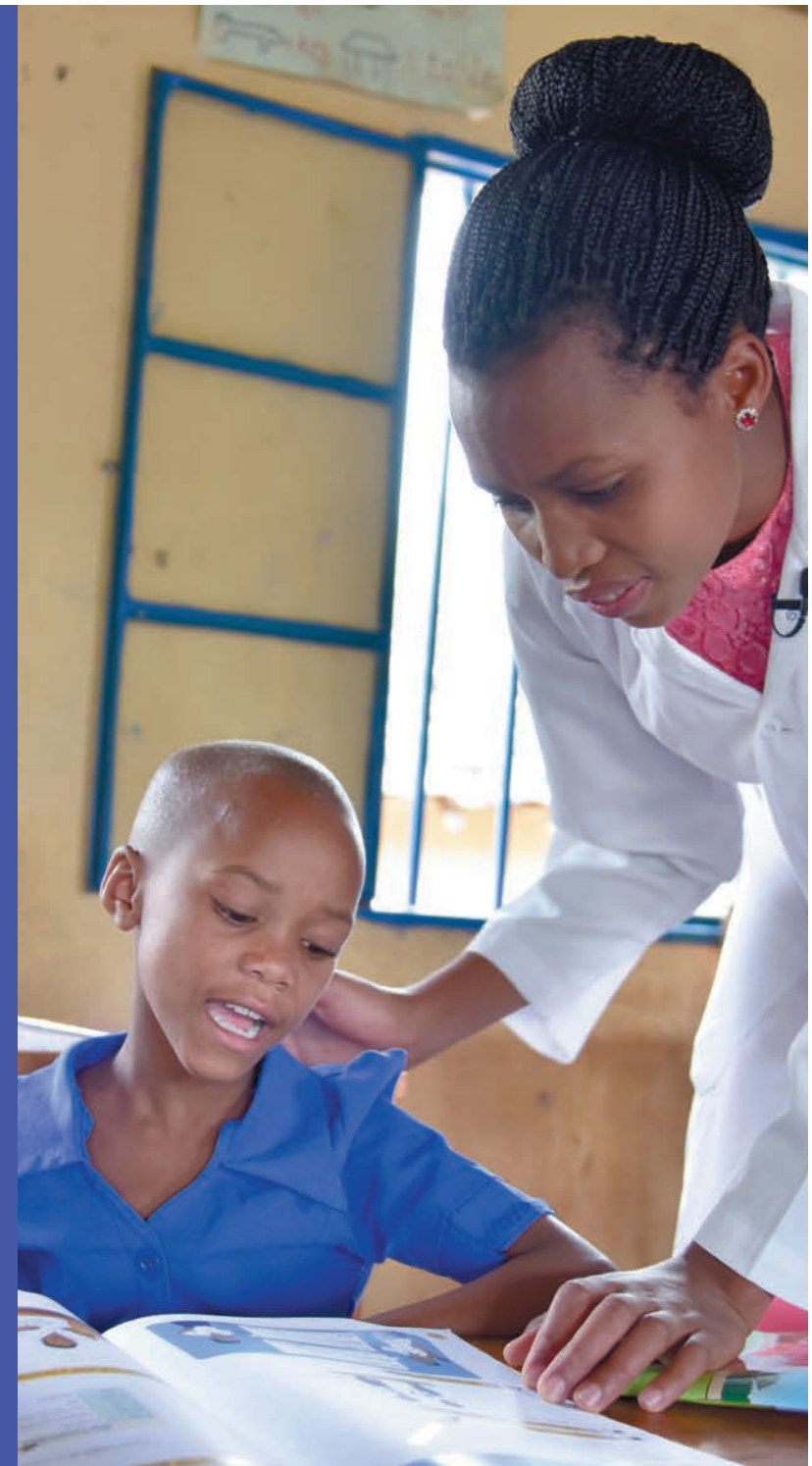
MORE THAN A RESEARCH PROJECT

The research leveraged the Education Development Trust's existing relationship with the REB, established through the Building Learning Foundations Programme, to deepen collaboration through a **learning partnership** approach. This meant that the Rwandan stakeholders, including Ministry officials and school leaders, served as critical partners in the co-design and implementation of each phase of the research process.

This approach ensured the issues investigated were priorities for local stakeholders and promoted **ongoing, dynamic dialogue around emerging findings to influence decision-making** which could be acted on to create impact.
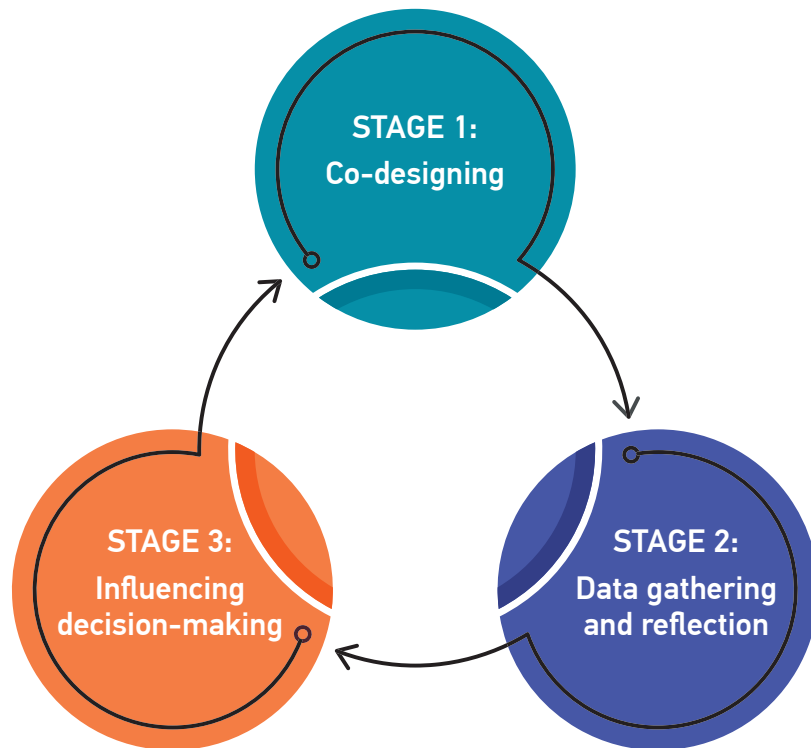
STAGES OF THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

STAGE 1: Co-designing

STAGE 2: Data gathering and reflection

STAGE 3: Influencing decision-making

CO-DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

All partners worked together to shape the concept and scope of the project, collaboratively developing research questions, research tools and methodology, and case study selection criteria.

GATHERING AND REFLECTING ON THE DATA

All partners collaborated to gather and analyze the data and interpret the findings from the surveys, and interviews and case studies. All partners discussed the policy implications through structured questioning and inquiry.

INFLUENCING DECISION-MAKING

Insights from the data and policy considerations were co-constructed with all partners and then developed into user-friendly formats to share widely with the international community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research was guided by three interrelated questions.

PRIMARY

1 - What is the role of school leaders and system leaders in mitigating the inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis during school closure and reopening?

2 - What are the skills, competencies and behaviors that school and system leaders demonstrated that have promoted equity?

SECONDARY

3 - What is the role of collaborative structures, such as professional learning communities or community networks, in supporting leaders to promote equity?

INQUIRY CATEGORIES	
COMMUNITY AROUND THE SCHOOL	• Parent and community engagement and communication • Support with learning and instructional materials • School governance at school and sector level
TEACHERS	• Developing/supporting remote learning solutions • Assessment of learning loss and strategies to bridge the gap • Supporting/developing teacher capacity to use remote learning approaches and implement remedial/catch up/accelerated learning • Use of available resources (human, material and ICT) • Approaches to maximize equity in remote learning • Safeguarding of teachers and school staff
LEARNERS	• Minimizing dropout (especially most vulnerable groups) • Student motivation (to attend remote learning and resume schooling) • Availability of resources (accessible to all learners including those with disabilities or learning difficulties) • Student wellbeing and safeguarding (including against gender-based violence)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach for the research was used, including a literature review, surveys and interviews, and case studies of multiple schools.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND SCOPING OF EXISTING TOOLS

A desk review highlighted promising skills and behaviors for promoting equity to be explored in the research.

Existing competency-based survey tools from WISE, OECD and the Building EdTech Evidence and Research (BETER) group informed tool development.

2. SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

Surveys and interviews with school leaders, teachers, students, district and sector education officers helped identify bright spots of promising practice.

3. CASE STUDIES

Case study schools (those more effective in supporting vulnerable learners) were identified by the local Building Learning Foundations team.

Deep dives into case study schools helped explore the bright spots – unique and positive actions, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs of school and system leaders.

METHOD	STAKEHOLDER GROUP	SAMPLE SIZE
SURVEYS	School leaders	100
	District and Sector Education Officers	21
INTERVIEWS	Rwanda Education Board (REB)	1
	Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)	1
CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS	School leaders, teachers, students and caregivers	13

*See Annex for a list of the research tools.

BUILDING ON EMERGING EVIDENCE

LESSONS FROM THE EMERGING GLOBAL LITERATURE ON THE CHALLENGES AND PROMISING PRACTICES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS
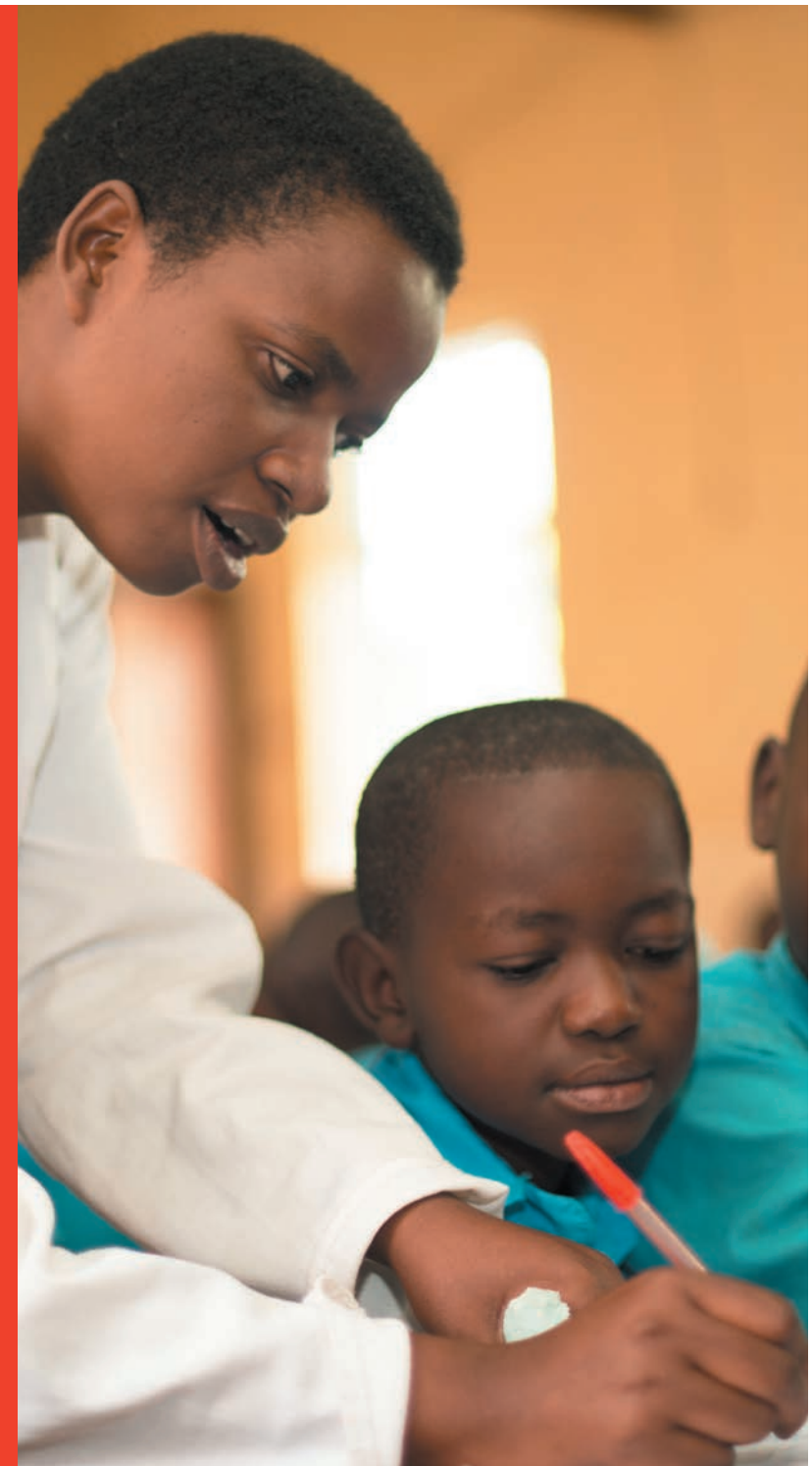
KEY CHALLENGES OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS FOR LEADERS WERE BECOMING CLEAR AT THE TIME OF PROJECT DESIGN.

Leading the recovery of a school community after a crisis involves a delicate balancing act.

• Recovery may be more about the role schools play in **emotional and social recovery** and less about minimizing the loss of student learning time (Labra Cardero, 2020).

• In periods of uncertainty, leaders need to adapt quickly to a rapidly changing situation and draw on different skills and types of leadership (Walker et al., 2020).

'School leadership has been reconfigured during the COVID-19 crisis. While school leaders are still leading their schools, they are doing so distanced and disconnected from their learners for whom they are expected to provide support through remote learning.'

HARRIS, 2020

SEVERAL PROMISING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES WERE ALSO IDENTIFIED IN THE EMERGING LITERATURE DURING COVID-19.

• Embracing **teacher agency, agility and innovation** in a challenging time when teachers are expected to find teaching and learning solutions for their learners – often beyond assigned administrative duties and roles (Netolicky, 2020).

• **Promoting collaborative professionalism, particularly collective autonomy, collective efficacy, collective responsibility, collective initiative, joint work and common meaning and purpose,** to develop resilient leadership (Hargreaves and O'Connor cited in Netolicky, 2020).

• Deeper **communication with students and families** about changing circumstances and expectations.

• **Combining different leadership styles,** such as transformational (change-focused), instructional and pedagogical (focused on teaching and learning) as well as transformative (change that prioritizes equity and social justice) (Robinson et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2016; Diamond, 2013; Harris, 2009; Jean-Marie, 2008).

• **Supporting teachers with clear expectations and structures** that take their needs, feedback and wellbeing into consideration (Hargreaves, A., Wangia, S. and O'Connor cited in Netolicky, 2020).

• **Breaking down the broader challenges into phases** to help leaders move forward without becoming overwhelmed by the scale of the problem (Jacobs and Zmuda, 2020).

• **Establishing a crisis management team, using talent within the community and identifying key common technology platforms for communication** to help restore normalcy (Jacobs and Zmuda, 2020).

• **Tapping into the expertise of the wider school community,** such as the school counselor, psychologist, nurse or chaplain, and information and resource specialists, parents, local individuals and networks to support the school's leadership team (Whitla, 2003).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS, COMMON CHALLENGES, BRIGHT SPOTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS, QUOTES AND CASE STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

SUMMARY FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest three overarching ways in which leaders were able to provide learning continuity and other support during closures and reopening, especially for the most marginalized.

Six areas of findings are organized under these three overarching categories:

1. ENGAGEMENT WITH CAREGIVERS, COMMUNITIES AND OTHER SECTORS

AREA 1: Leaders reached out to families and caregivers.

AREA 2: Leaders leveraged communities and professionals from other sectors.

2. SCHOOL LEADER AND TEACHER COLLABORATION

AREA 3: Leaders communicated with teachers and supported their self-efficacy.

AREA 4: Leaders collaborated with each other and promoted teacher collaboration.

3. TRACKING, SHARING INFORMATION AND PROVIDING TARGETED SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS

AREA 5: Leaders and teachers tracked and shared information on vulnerable learners.

AREA 6: Leaders and teachers provided targeted support.

ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION AND BUILDING FUTURE RESILIENCE

ENGAGEMENT WITH CAREGIVERS, COMMUNITIES AND OTHER SECTORS

AREA 1

LEADERS REACHED OUT TO FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

AREA 2

LEADERS LEVERAGED COMMUNITIES AND PROFESSIONALS FROM OTHER SECTORS

AREA 1
LEADERS REACHED OUT TO FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

**SURVEY AND
INTERVIEW RESULTS**

Eighty-three percent of school leaders surveyed said they **worked with the school parent board** to help provide continuity of learning for students during school closures and **nearly half were in touch with up to a quarter of all student families.**

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
How did you utilize community expertise by working with any of the following groups or individuals during school closures?
(Please select all that apply, N=100)

Working with the school parent board	83%
Work with community groups and volunteers	53%
Working with health workers to support learners and their families	52%
Establishing crisis managment group	35%
Working with counsellors to support wellbeing of learners	19%
Working with disablility groups	13%
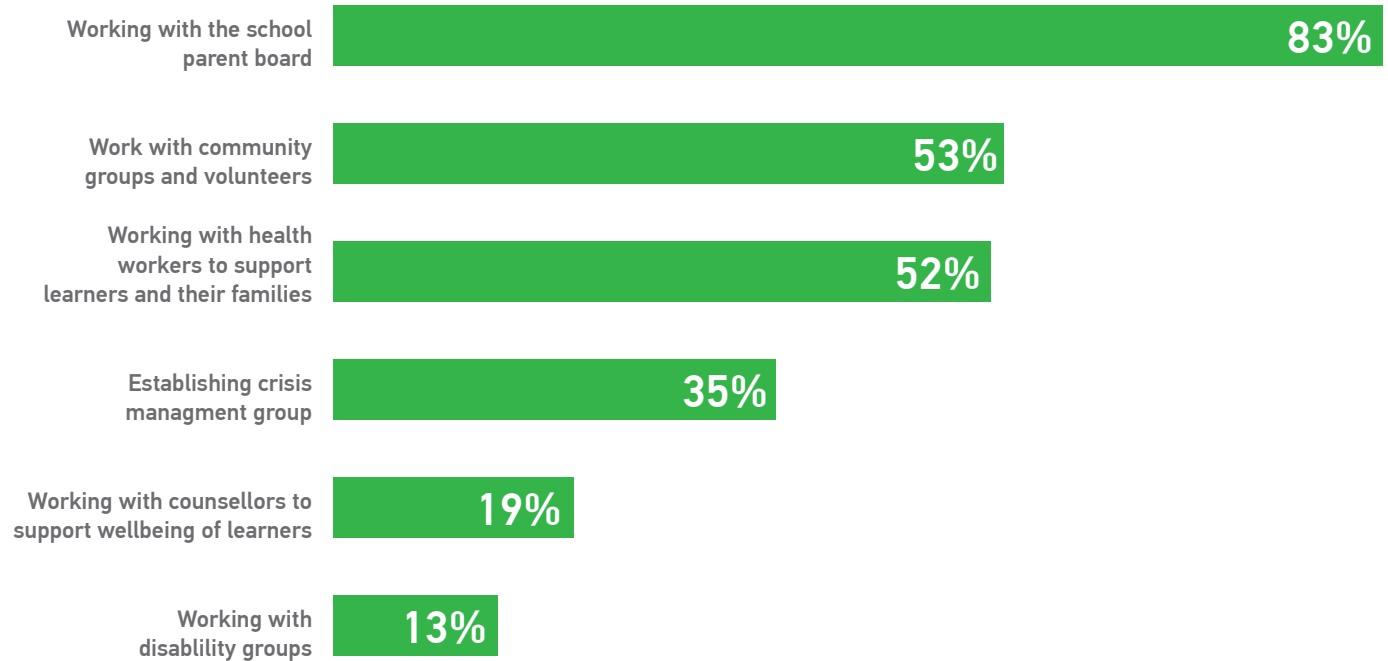
AREA 1
LEADERS REACHED OUT TO FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

Half of leaders provided **emotional support to parents** in their outreach.

Sixty-two percent of leaders were concerned that parents would be reluctant to send their children back to school, and 86 percent of leaders indicated that they or their teachers **visited student households** to minimize dropout.

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
If you were in contact with families, what did this contact involve?
(Please select all that apply, N=95)

Providing information about Covid-19	83%
Supporting children's academic learning	64%
Checking for signs of violence, abuse, exploitation	58%
Providing emotional support to parents	51%
Providing emotional support to students	27%
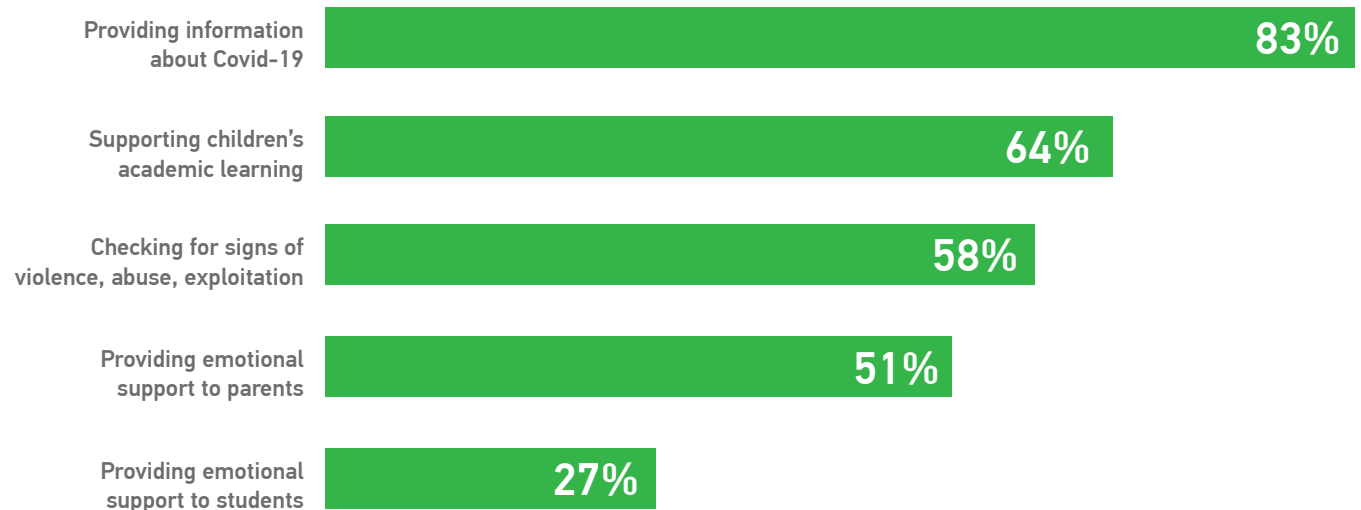
AREA 1
LEADERS REACHED OUT TO FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

COMMON CHALLENGES

• Over half of the learners interviewed indicated that they had limited parental support for learning.

• Not all school leaders and teachers were clear on expectations for engaging with caregivers and/or how to do so.

• Resource issues, such as lack of money on phones to purchase airtime, were a barrier to communication among school leaders and teachers assigned to caregivers.

• Forty-seven percent of school leaders reported that teachers had heavy domestic demands and could not dedicate time to students.

• Some caregivers were particularly difficult to contact, such as those in remote rural areas.

BRIGHT SPOTS

• Many teachers and school leaders showed extraordinary initiative in reaching out to caregivers. Some school leaders created geographic 'zones' of learners, and divided teachers into groups, each assigned to a different community to help reach households more efficiently.
One school leader set up 'parent visitation groups' who were responsible for reaching out to caregivers, either in person or by phone.

• Some school leaders engaged with parent committees to develop plans for school closure and reopening. In one case study school, school leaders, teachers and the School General Assembly Council worked with caregivers to make sure safety measures were in place and to reach out to other caregivers to ensure they understood school plans for reopening.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

• **Clearly outlining and communicating the role of school leaders and teachers** can help more effectively guide caregivers to support their children's learning. This should include **clarifying and defining the role of caregivers in student learning and wellbeing**, including caregivers of vulnerable children.

• **Formalizing accessible communication and engagement structures and drawing on existing ones** (such as focal points, community groups and parent committees) can enable leaders and teachers to more efficiently reach out and engage with caregivers and the community, especially during school closures.

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLS

'The school leader set up a family visit group to encourage caregivers to give their children time and attention to distance learning and not to forget their own children.'

TEACHER

'Yes, I knew them [homes of learners] and I visited some of them – especially slow learners... to see if their life is ok.'

TEACHER

'We travelled in groups and encouraged caregivers. We also used communication to improve children's learning strategies.'

TEACHER

'Money for calling caregivers and internet bundles was a challenge.'

TEACHER

CASE STUDY: WORKING COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

One school leader worked collaboratively with the Dean of Studies and teacher representatives, and divided teachers into 'learners' zones' to provide support to learners in their local areas during school closures. The principal used the school WhatsApp group, phone calls and SMS, and continually mobilized their administrative and teaching staff to support learners in their respective zones. Support for learning included sharing the REB weekly timetable with parents and students and conducting home visits as much as possible to ensure learners were supported.

Every week, the school principal requested that teachers share best practices and challenges with a view to collaborating for solutions. The principal and teachers prepared weekly evaluations for students, and each teacher tried their best to reach learners in their zones.

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AREA 2
LEADERS LEVERAGED COMMUNITIES AND PROFESSIONALS FROM OTHER SECTORS.

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

• More than half of all school leaders engaged with community groups, and 97 percent used **engagement with community leaders** as a way to minimize dropout. Other approaches included speaking to peers to encourage friends back to school.

• Most schools **collaborated with health workers** to reach out to vulnerable learners during closures and reopening.

• Ninety-one percent of school leaders **leveraged community leaders,** and 66 percent used community meetings as the top two ways to communicate school reopening to students and parents.

• Ninety-two percent of **school leaders believed that their community could work together** during COVID-19 and 84 percent believed **their community trusted them.**

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
How did you communicate school reopening to parents and students?
(Please select all that apply, N=96)

Using community leaders	91%
Community meetings	66%
Through teachers	56%
Face to face	46%
WhatsApp	42%
Phone calls	31%
Using radio stations	28%
Flyers delivered to homes	25%

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
What strategies have you put in place to minimize dropout and support vulnerable students to transition back to school?
(Please select all that apply, N=97)

Working with community leaders	97%
Household visits from myself or teachers	87%
Campaigning via radio/TV/Social media	23%

AREA 2
LEADERS LEVERAGED COMMUNITIES AND PROFESSIONALS FROM OTHER SECTORS.

COMMON CHALLENGES

• Due to COVID-19 containment measures, such as restrictions on movement and convening, engagement with community groups and other agencies at the community-level was difficult.

• There was inconsistency in community engagement across different schools.

BRIGHT SPOTS

• Some teachers and school leaders engaged with different community groups to encourage learners to return to school. One case study school worked with a disability group to reach out to learners with disabilities during school closures and to communicate school reopening.

• Another case study school worked with reading advocates through an existing collaboration on student learning campaigns.

• Most schools worked with health officials to make reopening plans.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

• **Strengthening school leaders' role as facilitators of engagement with the community** and **establishing collaborative mechanisms** (such as working groups) at the local administrative level could help meet the full range of needs of vulnerable children in a holistic way.

• **Developing a database of all stakeholders and focal points at each level of the system** could facilitate quicker responses in emergency situations (based on findings from the literature review).

• **Maintaining existing policy and procedures and strengthening relationships for school leaders to connect with local health officials** will be critical in the ongoing response to the crisis, as well as post-COVID-19.

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLS

'Working with community groups and volunteers [on supporting vulnerable learners]. We have chosen to work with caregivers' representatives and reading advocates because we are already collaborating in a variety of student learning campaigns.'

SCHOOL LEADER

'Together with representatives of caregivers and reading campaigners, we visited some families to see how the children monitor the lessons at home and [how] each teacher in the local area helps the students. We [also] went through various announcements in the cell where our school was built.'

SCHOOL LEADER

'As soon as I heard the announcement on the radio that schools were closed due to the Covid [pandemic], I immediately stayed home.'

TEACHER

CASE STUDY: HARNESSING COMMUNITY LEADERS AND LOCAL GROUPS

One case study school worked with a local disability group to identify other support available for children with disabilities from their school. They coordinated with this group when reaching out to families. Another school coordinated with 'reading campaigners' and parent committee members to visit schools to encourage learners to read and to ensure they had resources to learn.

Schools reported working with local community leaders and with local education authorities to coordinate back to school campaigns for students. Multiple schools reported working with local community leaders to help spread the word about school reopening. This typically included making announcements during community meetings and radio programs or through other community forums.

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SCHOOL LEADER AND TEACHER COLLABORATION

AREA 3
LEADERS COMMUNICATED WITH TEACHERS AND SUPPORTED THEIR SELF-EFFICACY

AREA 4
LEADERS COLLABORATED WITH EACH OTHER AND PROMOTED TEACHER COLLABORATION

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AREA 3
LEADERS COMMUNICATED WITH TEACHERS AND SUPPORTED THEIR SELF-EFFICACY.

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

• **Communication:** Most teachers surveyed had regular check-ins with their school leaders during closures. Some school leaders collaborated closely with teachers; 70 percent worked with teachers to build a shared vision.

• **Support for self-efficacy:** Fifty-five percent of school leaders said they delegated to teachers more during school closures and 60 percent gave teachers the freedom to take innovative risks to support continuity of learning. Almost half used check ins to help teachers with their health and wellbeing.

• **Guidance:** More than three-quarters of leaders provided teachers with support on remote teaching, such as how to use radio to support student learning at a distance and online platforms for sharing information.

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
Did you provide guidance or support to teachers in the following areas? Percentage of school leaders that answered 'yes'.
(Please select all that apply, N=96).

How to use radio to support student learning at a distance	86%
How to use platforms for sharing information (Google drive, WhatsApp)	76%
Giving teachers freedom to take innovative risks to support continuity of learning	60%
Guidance and counselling	59%
Delegation of responsibility to teachers	55%
How to use TV to support student learning at a distance	54%
Trusting teachers with independent decision-making to support their learners	35%
How to support students who do not have access to technology	34%
How to support vulnerable learners	31%
How to assess student progress remotely	30%

AREA 3
LEADERS COMMUNICATED WITH TEACHERS AND SUPPORTED THEIR SELF-EFFICACY.

COMMON CHALLENGES

• School leaders reported challenges communicating with teachers due to geographic distance and lack of access to phones.

• Some teachers struggled to respond to the crisis because of lack of guidance and contact from school leaders. Some reported being effectively cut off from school leaders.

BRIGHT SPOTS

• Most school leaders reported holding regular check-ins with their teachers.

• Some school leaders called teachers to raise awareness of COVID-19 protocols.

• During 1:1 phone conversations, leaders asked teachers how they were coping, and provided guidance on how to support learners and reach the most vulnerable children.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

• Include **overall wellbeing of teachers and learners** in the role of school leaders beyond administrative and instructional leadership roles.

• Set expectations that **school leaders will be responsible for guiding teachers to support all learners**, particularly the most vulnerable.

• Provide **guidance and professional development to school leaders** to support them in meeting expectations around wellbeing and vulnerable learners.

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLS

'He [school leader] called us and reminded us of strategies to prevent COVID- 19 and encouraged us to train children on how to prevent it: always wear a handkerchief and wash your hands.'

TEACHER

'I spoke to the school leader and the accountant and the course manager. Often… we talked [on WhatsApp] about classes, school life, COVID-19 and school buildings. In the exchange of information, we were updated and involved.'

TEACHER

'The school leaders spoke to us several times and gave us information on what to look for that enabled us to monitor more children while the school was closed.'

TEACHER

CASE STUDY: CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS

One school leader established continual communication with teachers throughout school closures. In addition to regularly checking in with teachers via WhatsApp and SMS, the principal also encouraged teachers to share the highs and lows of their remote teaching support to learners on a weekly basis, encouraging teachers to support one another, and give advice on overcoming challenges. The school leader also tried to maintain weekly evaluation of student learning activities by assigning teachers household visits to check on learners and evaluate their learning progress. The school leader did not use a standard approach to assess learning, but asked teachers to make judgements and comment on identified progress.

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AREA 4
LEADERS COLLABORATED WITH EACH OTHER AND PROMOTED TEACHER COLLABORATION.

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

• Ninety percent of leaders engaged with a school leader organization or network during school closures and 93 percent of them engaged after reopening.

• Ninety-five percent of leaders primarily focused on sharing plans to support learners and logistical preparation for school reopening.

• Eighty-five percent of leaders also engaged in networks to give and receive advice on reducing learning loss, and 46 percent engaged to discuss teacher training.

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
What did your engagement with headteacher organisations involve?
(Please select all that apply, N=95)
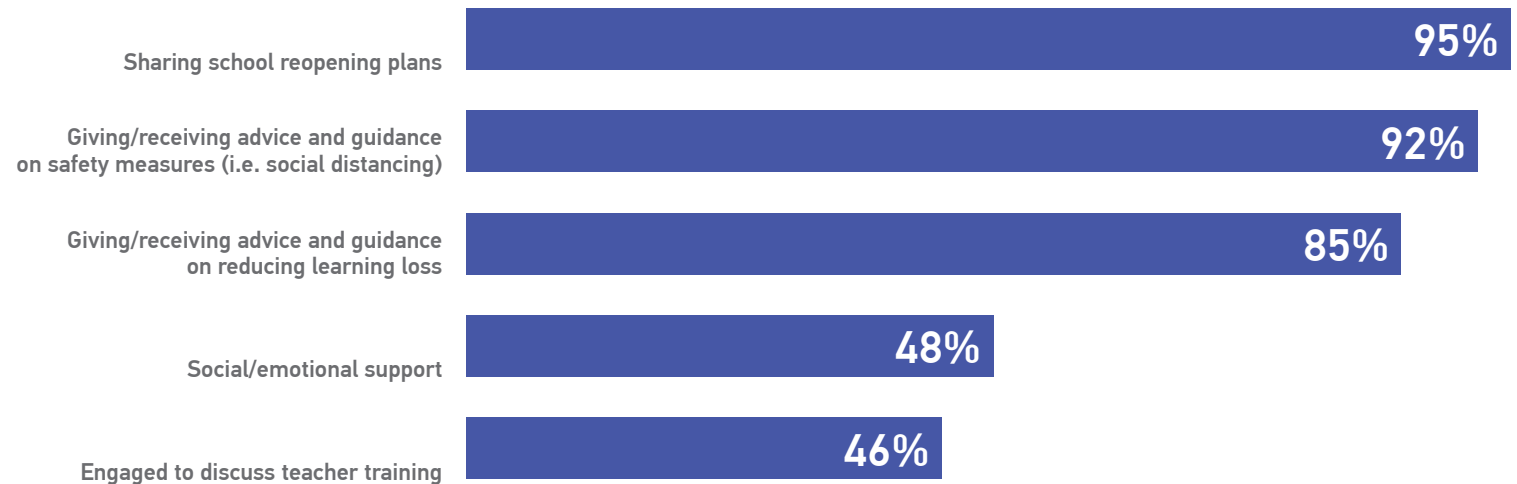
Category	Percentage
Sharing school reopening plans	95%
Giving/receiving advice and guidance on safety measures (i.e. social distancing)	92%
Giving/receiving advice and guidance on reducing learning loss	85%
Social/emotional support	48%
Engaged to discuss teacher training	46%

AREA 4
LEADERS COLLABORATED WITH EACH OTHER AND PROMOTED TEACHER COLLABORATION.

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

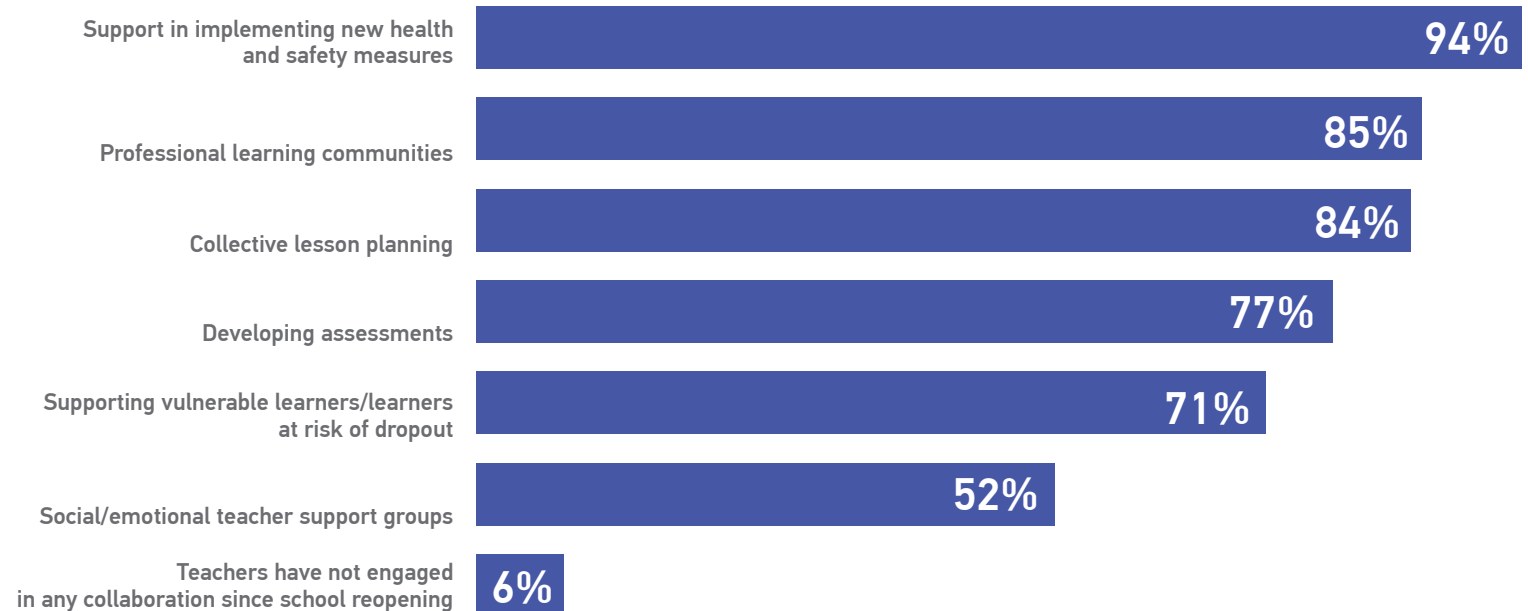• Eighty-five percent of school leaders reported that teachers collaborated with other teachers through professional learning communities (communities of practice) established prior to the crisis.

• Teachers collaborated on sharing resources, planning for reopening and on implementing new health and safety measures.

• More than half of teachers also collaborated on collective lesson planning, developing assessments and supporting vulnerable learners.

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
Have teachers collaborated in any of the following areas since schools reopened? Percentage of school leaders who answered 'yes'.
(Please select all that apply, N=96)

Category	Percentage
Support in implementing new health and safety measures	94%
Professional learning communities	85%
Collective lesson planning	84%
Developing assessments	77%
Supporting vulnerable learners/learners at risk of dropout	71%
Social/emotional teacher support groups	52%
Teachers have not engaged in any collaboration since school reopening	6%

AREA 4
LEADERS COLLABORATED WITH EACH OTHER AND PROMOTED TEACHER COLLABORATION.

COMMON CHALLENGES

In areas where there were not pre-established professional learning communities (PLCs), some schools struggled to sustain collaboration among teachers due to time constraints, lack of access to technology and weak coordination structures.

BRIGHT SPOTS

• Some schools continued to operate monthly PLCs for teachers and school leaders during school closures.

• Some teachers collaborated closely with their school leaders to prepare for school reopening.

• Teachers supported one another, shared resources and planned lessons and remedial teaching together.

• One school created an online space to facilitate teacher collaboration, with others using informal platforms such as WhatsApp.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

• Strengthen communities of practice (CoPs) by **giving teachers more ownership** to ensure maximum relevance to challenges and opportunities at the local level.

• Strengthen school leaders' role as facilitators of teacher leadership.

• **Leverage low-tech solutions** to provide space for informal teacher collaboration while enhancing access and use of the IT solutions being developed.

• **Embed peer feedback** in the teacher appraisal system to stregthen informal collaborations among teachers, possibly through the CoP structure (based on findings from the literature review).

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLS

'Yes. I spoke to the school leader... about five [times]. It was about going to support children who would come to school, encouraging us to be good caregivers.'

TEACHER

'Teachers met to prepare lessons, had time to read to gain knowledge, collaborate on planning assessments through departments and CoPs... to conduct teacher meetings using technology.'

SCHOOL LEADER

'Yes, I continued to work with other teachers. We used the phone to connect the lines and do the numerical and English CoPs once a month. It would require sharing information so that we are helping the children where we live with the existing barriers and taking steps to overcome those barriers.'

TEACHER

'Yes. I spoke to the school leader three times. It was about CoPs. What helped was the preparation of the lessons based on the meeting we discussed at CoPs.'

TEACHER

'[The school leaders] encouraged a permanent education team to participate in the education of children with disabilities.'

TEACHER

TRACKING, SHARING INFORMATION AND PROVIDING TARGETED SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS

AREA 5
LEADERS AND TEACHERS TRACKED AND SHARED INFORMATION ON VULNERABLE LEARNERS

AREA 6
LEADERS AND TEACHERS PROVIDED TARGETED SUPPORT

AREA 5
LEADERS AND TEACHERS TRACKED AND SHARED INFORMATION ON VULNERABLE LEARNERS.
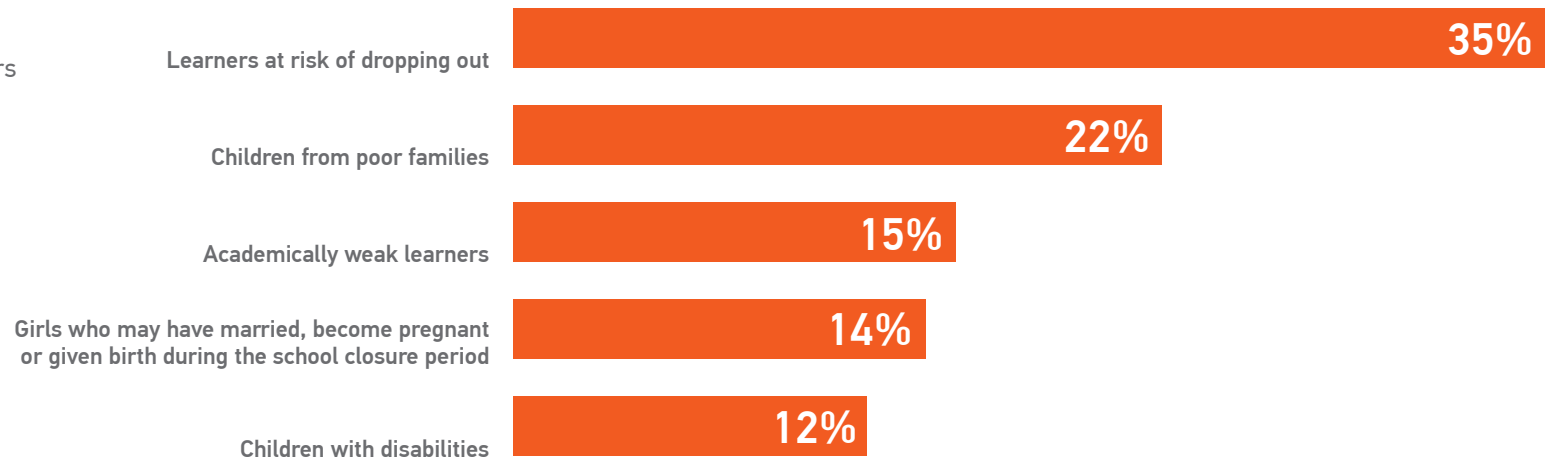
SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

• Some school leaders focused on specific groups of vulnerable learners. Thirty-five percent of school leaders focused on those at risk of dropping out and 22 percent focused on students from poor families. Fourteen percent of school leaders focused on girls who may have married or remarried, become pregnant or given birth during closures.

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
Did you provide guidance or support to teachers in the following areas?
(Please select all that apply, N=96)

Category	Percentage
Learners at risk of dropping out	35%
Children from poor families	22%
Academically weak learners	15%
Girls who may have married, become pregnant or given birth during the school closure period	14%
Children with disabilities	12%

AREA 5
LEADERS AND TEACHERS TRACKED AND SHARED INFORMATION ON VULNERABLE LEARNERS.

COMMON CHALLENGES

• Many of the most vulnerable learners were in remote, difficult-to-access locations.

• Hard-to-reach, learners especially those in the most remote areas, had not returned to school.

• There was a wide variation in how teachers addressed students with learning challenges: some students were not learning at all during school closures, whereas others were engaged in daily learning activities.

• Children lost interest in learning due to prolonged school closures.

BRIGHT SPOTS

• Some schools assessed the vulnerability of learners.

• Some schools mapped the location of the most vulnerable learners when schools closed, and assigned nearby teachers to provide support.

• School leaders shared information with local authorities to facilitate follow up with learners who had not reported to school.

• Some school leaders organized meetings with teachers to prepare for school reopenings.

• All schools reported having assessed learners to ascertain learning levels and guide extra support needed.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

• Closely **track participation** of vulnerable learners.

• Improve ability to **identify and reach vulnerable students at all times** by collecting information about all students, contributing to the Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS), and integrating CAMIS with the School Data Management Information System (SDMIS) at the Rwanda Ministry of Education.

• Support school leaders to i**mprove use of data.**

• Consider the **varying needs of different groups of vulnerable learners** and establish guidance and processes to meet them.

• Ensure all interventions have **a low-tech/no-tech safety net solution** that maximizes equity.

• Plan professional development of teachers and school leaders on **use of assessment data to design level-appropriate support for learners.**

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLS

'After analyzing the results from comprehensive assessment, we have [a] plan to support different groups of learners, especially learners with difficulty learning and with disability.'

TEACHER

'They have been going to find them at home... and work with local authorities. There was a so-called back-to school-campaign.'

TEACHER

'Work with local authorities to exchange information and share reports on the status of participation.'

SCHOOL LEADER

'Identifying them [and] planning remedial programs for regular monitoring in their classrooms.'

TEACHER

CASE STUDY: MAPPING VULNERABLE LEARNERS

In one case study school, the school leader responded to school closures quickly by mapping the households of teachers and students using available data on home addresses and parent contact details. The aim of this exercise was to ensure that as many students as possible could be provided with some level of support, however minor, from teachers. Teachers were assigned a number of students who lived in their local area to visit periodically. Household visits would include welfare checks to ensure children were okay, to provide information about radio lessons, or to provide resources where available. All visits adhered to Rwanda's COVID-19 social distancing safety protocols.

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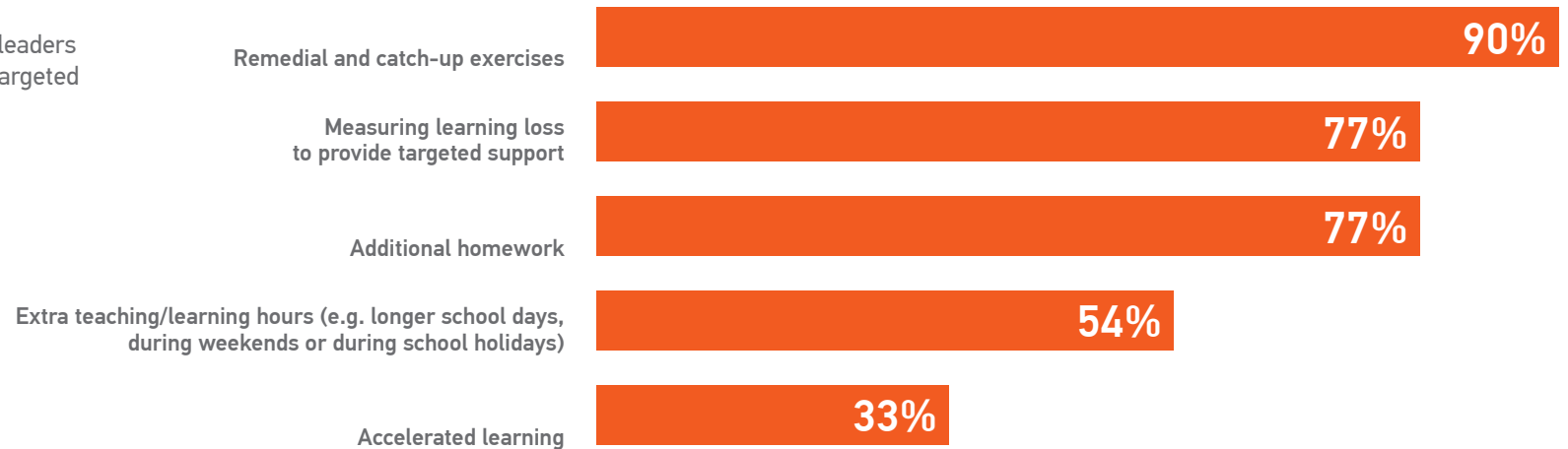# AREA 6
LEADERS AND TEACHERS PROVIDED TARGETED SUPPORT.

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

- Ninety percent of leaders used remedial exercises to minimize learning loss.

- Thirty-one percent of leaders prioritized the wellbeing of the school community during reopening.

- Seventy-seven percent of school leaders measured learning loss to provide targeted support to minimize it.

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
What approaches have been adopted to minimize learning loss resulting from school closures?
(Please select all that apply, N=96)

Approach	Percentage
Remedial and catch-up exercises	90%
Measuring learning loss to provide targeted support	77%
Additional homework	77%
Extra teaching/learning hours (e.g. longer school days, during weekends or during school holidays)	54%
Accelerated learning	33%

AREA 6
LEADERS AND TEACHERS PROVIDED TARGETED SUPPORT.

COMMON CHALLENGES

• Teachers had to balance personalized support for learners with maintaining social distancing.

• Some teachers struggled to speak while wearing masks.

• Some girls were exposed to more risks when out of school, particularly when working outside their homes, which made it difficult to monitor them.

• Some learners have not returned to school due to engagement in paid employment or early pregnancy.

• Due to high levels of poverty, most vulnerable learners did not have access to radio or TV and it was difficult for them to access paper-based materials.

BRIGHT SPOTS

• Some teachers checked in with girls and provided reproductive health support.

• Some schools organized delivery of learning materials to the most vulnerable learners in their homes to enable return to school.

• All schools reported planning for remedial teaching to mitigate learning loss (such as starting one hour earlier).

• Some schools considered learner wellbeing and its impact on learning, and created forums for psychosocial support of learners.

• In preparation for school reopening, teachers and other school staff visited households to encourage learners back to school.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

• **Consider incentives, such as fee waivers, for most vulnerable learners**. This worked well in encouraging attendance and retention of learners during the West African Ebola crisis (Carvalho et al., 2020).

• Establish **clear procedures for following up with vulnerable learners** as soon as data demonstrates the need to reach specific individuals or groups.

• Integrate **professional development of teachers and leaders on remedial and accelerated learning and support for wellbeing** into the standard continuous professional development program.

• Consider all options for **extending hours of instruction/time spent learning** and the implications for school leaders.

• **Strengthen linkages between schools and communities** to facilitate follow up with learners.

VOICES FROM THE SCHOOLS

'I helped 20 children, including children with disabilities and others, which took time and work with my fellow teachers and caregivers to achieve.'

TEACHER

'Some of the children with disabilities were visited by teachers who watched how they were and helped in radio courses.'

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'I encouraged children to continue their studies and talked to girls about reproductive health.'

TEACHER

'The principal called us and informed us about the start of the school and asked us to join in the preparations. We organized a home campaign to inform the children that they were going to eat, that they should find school supplies.'

TEACHER

'[The school leaders] encouraged a permanent education team to participate in the education of children with disabilities.'

TEACHER

CASE STUDY: PROVIDING TARGETED SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE LEARNERS

In one rural school, the focus for the school leaders and teachers was not solely on ensuring continuity of learning and minimizing learning loss upon students' return to school, but also on financial and wellbeing support too. One teacher reported supporting a total of 13 learners, including wellbeing checks, ensuring they had school supplies, and identifying vulnerable learners who needed specialized support. The school principal reported on wellbeing as a top priority for the school, and commented on how COVID-19 had a huge effect on families already in poverty. They emphasized the role of the school in providing additional support to these families where possible.

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SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND BEHAVIORS

SKILLS, COMPETENCIES AND BEHAVIORS FOR LEADERSHIP NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

The survey results and interviews illuminated specific skills, competencies and behaviors that we believe will be important for leadership now and in the future.
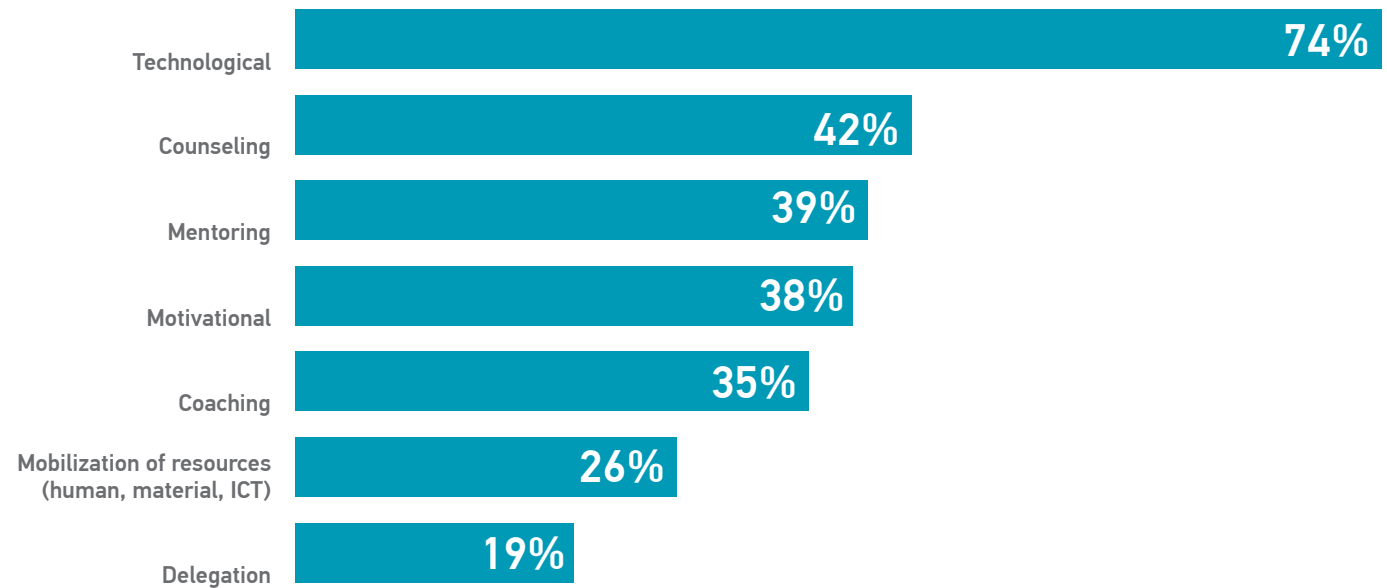
SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

● The survey results suggest leaders were relatively adept at **managing uncertainty**. The majority made decisions using government guidance and data on students as well as providing guidance to teachers and families.

● Survey results and case studies also showed that many leaders were **open to learning and trying new approaches**. Seventy-four percent felt comfortable using technology during school closures, and many made decisions collaboratively with a range of stakeholders.

● While many leaders supported the wellbeing of teachers and learners, less than half felt comfortable with practices such as counseling, mentoring and motivating, which could support **leading with compassion and empathy.**

Q. SCHOOL LEADERS:
Which skills did you feel comfortable using during school closures?
(Please select all that apply, N=97)

Skill	%
Technological	74%
Counseling	42%
Mentoring	39%
Motivational	38%
Coaching	35%
Mobilization of resources (human, material, ICT)	26%
Delegation	19%

SKILLS, COMPETENCIES AND BEHAVIORS FOR LEADERSHIP NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Specific skills identified as crucial in supporting more resilient education systems included three overarching skills with associated behaviors and practices: managing uncertainty, being open to learning and trying new approaches, and leading with compassion and empathy.

MANAGING UNCERTAINTY	**BEING OPEN TO LEARNING AND TRYING NEW APPROACHES**	**LEADING WITH COMPASSION AND EMPATHY**
Making decisions quickly and efficiently using all available data	Comfortable with using technology	Behaving with empathy and compassion towards caregivers and teachers
Providing clear advice and guidance	Making decisions collaboratively with a range of stakeholders	Supporting colleagues through regular check-ins
	Willing to be flexible and change direction	

'A key competency needed from leaders is flexibility. When things change, you should be prepared not to stick to your traditional ways. So flexibility and being proactive is useful. And building resilience in the system. We have to put all our effort into what we are doing – working day and night to accomplish things.'

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OFFICIAL

ANNEXES

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LIST OF RESEARCH TOOLS

School leader survey

Central level interview guide

District and Sector Official survey

Teacher interview guide

Parent interview guide

Learner survey

FULL LITERATURE REVIEW
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS (1)

School leadership has been reconfigured during the COVID-19 crisis. Prior to the pandemic, the type of leadership most typically found in schools could be described as traditional, involving running schools and ensuring productive teaching and learning. While school leaders are still leading their schools, they are doing so remotely, distanced and disconnected from their learners whom they are expected to support through remote learning (Harris, 2020). While the evidence base on school leadership within a pandemic is sparse, there are some patterns of practice emerging that offer pointers and insights into how school leaders are functioning.

Recent literature suggests that embracing **teacher agency, agility and innovation** has become a promising practice in a challenging time when teachers are expected to find teaching and learning solutions for their learners often beyond assigned administrative duties/roles (Netolicky, 2020). Indeed, there is increased recognition of the crucial role of teacher agency as teachers act in 'leaderly' ways to make deliberate choices and innovate to support continuity of learning (Harris, 2020).

Some researchers have observed that **embracing principles of collaborative professionalism – particularly collective autonomy, collective efficacy, collective responsibility, collective initiative, joint work and common meaning and purpose – is key** to developing resilient leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As has been previously reported (Solvason and Kingston, 2019), there is emerging evidence that cross-school groups could provide school leaders with a safety net of emotional support, enhanced by shared values, a lack of hierarchy and openness of members to participate in the work of the group. This reflects current thinking on the importance of solidarity among school leaders across schools locally and globally.

The importance of collaborative leadership is reinforced by D'Auria and De Smet (2020) who reiterate that **when working through complexity, leaders should mobilise their teams by setting clear priorities for the response and empowering others to discover and implement solutions** that serve immediate priorities. This requires fostering collective and collaborative leadership capacity and acknowledging the impact of the collective. A common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support have been found to be key ingredients for sustaining a collaborative culture in emergency situations (Kania and Kramer 2011; Cabaj and Weaver, 2016).

Providing clear communication to students and families about changing circumstances and expectations has also been found to be an promising practice during the pandemic. Early evidence shows that families regarded school leaders as a key source of information, especially during the initial phases of the pandemic. Regular, honest communication, constant reassurance and support was found to be helpful, particularly to vulnerable learners and families (Earp, 2020).

Scheduling regular, individual check-ins with staff, as well as organizing social events to maintain connections and respond to personal challenges being experienced during the pandemic, has received approval from teachers. Evidence drawn from a recent study in Australia found that headteachers who made arrangements to check in with teachers to understand their needs received a higher approval rating. (Earp, 2020)

A new report from the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2020) that looked at education during the COVID-19 pandemic concluded that i**n periods of uncertainty, leaders need to adapt quickly to a rapidly changing situation, and to draw on different skills and types of leadership.** Combining different leadership styles such as transformational (change-focused), instructional/pedagogical (focused on teaching and learning) as well as transformative (change that prioritizes equity and social justice) was found to be promising during the pandemic. In addition, engaging with research and making the most of networks like school leaders' associations, local clusters, and former colleagues was associated with effective leaders. Importantly, the study found the need for school leaders to be sensitive to their context and focus on positive and sustainable relationships in their school communities. This has been widely reported in literature with Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) concluding that successful leaders combine practices in different ways across different phases of their school development.

Teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to dominate education policy discourse. Emerging evidence shows that supporting teachers through clear expectations and structures that take their needs and feedback into consideration is key to addressing their wellbeing. Shirley, Hargreaves and Washington (2020) found that teachers' wellbeing is likely to prosper in environments that engage them in: deep and morally inspiring purposes over which they exert shared professional control; meaningful collaborative professionalism that brings them closer to each other; working in multi-disciplinary teams to respond to the multiple diversities of their students; and when there is

external support from government and organizations. From this shared moral purpose, school leaders have enormous responsibility of providing opportunities for meaningful collaboration in online, remote or physically distanced models.

Lessons from other sectors suggest that **breaking down the broader challenges into phases may help leaders move forward without becoming overwhelmed by the scale of the problem**. For school leaders, rapidly sharing up-to-date government advice with school communities is vital as the crisis unfolds. Past crises also show that transparency and open communication are equally important in helping build a better understanding of the full picture. Once lockdown is lifted, focus of school leaders should be centered on increasing stability, reducing uncertainty for teachers, school staff, learners, and their families. More often, this demands adapting to new ways of working for a short or extended time. Lessons from school closures in Hong Kong during the 2019 protests show that establishing a crisis management team, using talent within the community and identifying key common technology platforms for communication can help in restoring normalcy (Jacobs and Zmuda, 2020).

Rebuilding during the transformation phase more often requires leaders **to adapt flexibly and strategically to changes in the environment** in order to sustain school improvement. Determining what has worked and what has not, and deciding what to drop, keep or further develop are key considerations to support learning and growth following a crisis. An important role for school leaders in this process is to broker agreement on what 'building back better' or the 'new normal' should look like, ensuring it centres on the needs of learners (Mutch, 2014). Taking time to reflect and learn from a critical incident is, therefore, a valuable exercise.

Tapping into the expertise of the wider school community has been touted as a promising leadership practice in times of crisis. Staff with professional qualifications beyond education such as the **school counselor, psychologist, nurse, chaplain, and information and resource specialists** are crucial in response to emergency situations. Information technology staff become heroes when remote schooling scenarios come into play, and facilities staff bear the brunt of restoring sites post-disaster. Supporting the supporters is a key element of a school's emergency management and recovery plan (Whitla, 2003). **Tapping into expertise and influencers among caregivers, local personalities and networks can also support the school's leadership team.**

Leading the recovery of a school community after a crisis involves a delicate balancing act. Key findings from the aftermath of crises such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Canterbury earthquake suggests that for schools, **recovery may be less about minimizing the loss of student learning time and more about the role schools play in emotional and social recovery**, which can reduce longer-term health concerns (Hattie, 2020). During this phase, school leaders should ensure that the needs of those impacted by the crisis are sensitively balanced with the desire to return to normal routines as quickly as possible.

A sense of connectedness and belonging is key to wellbeing. School leaders play a critical role in building a positive learning environment in which the whole school community feels included, connected, safe and respected (Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, 2018). Key predictors of wellbeing and resilience are centred around feeling Connected, Protected and Respected or 'CPR' (Fuller & Wicking, 2017). School leaders can foster

this by reaching out to people, asking if they are okay (connected), providing safe places to discuss ideas and feelings (protected) and acknowledging that people react and cope differently (respected) (Earp, 2020).

FULL CASE STUDY RESULTS

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY 1

**STRATEGIES USED
DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES**

• School leader created 'learner zones' and allocated nearby teachers to support learners during closures.

• Weekly visits to households from teachers and school administrators were conducted to check on students.

• Teachers assessed learners to identify the most vulnerable and provide individualized support.

• Extra support was given to vulnerable learners, particularly children with disabilities and girls deemed at risk.

• Every week, each teacher was asked to share best practice and a challenge to learn and overcome issues together.

• Student learning was evaluated wherever possible.

• School leader worked with School General Assembly Council (SGAC) throughout.

**STRATEGIES USED
WHEN REOPENING**

• Teachers and administrators visited homes within their zones to prepare children for coming back to school and minimize dropout.

• School leader asked teachers to prepare face-to-face lessons and extra classes for vulnerable learners.

• School leaders, teachers and SGAC worked with caregivers to make sure safety measures were in place, and to reach caregivers to ensure they understood.

**STRATEGIES USED
AFTER SCHOOL REOPENING**

• Students were assessed when they returned to school to measure learning loss and identify students who required additional support. Extra support included providing more learning materials and extra classes.

FULL CASE STUDY RESULTS

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY 2

**STRATEGIES USED
DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES**

• Groups of teachers were formed by school leaders to support students with disabilities and other vulnerable learners.

• Teachers were encouraged to visit households in the area where they lived.

• Teachers connected with each other via an online forum where they could share advice.

• School leaders had check-ins with teachers every two months to support teacher wellbeing and guide teachers on assisting learners at home.

• Teachers helped children without radios to source them from neighbors.

**STRATEGIES USED
WHEN REOPENING**

• Encouraging children to come back, particularly vulnerable students.

• Teachers helping implement safety measures in the school.

**STRATEGIES USED
AFTER SCHOOL REOPENING**

• Students were provided with notebooks, pens and other resources to ensure they had the necessary equipment when returning.

FULL CASE STUDY RESULTS

BRIGHT SPOT CASE STUDY 3

STRATEGIES USED
DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES

• Each teacher identified specific learners to support and follow up with in their homes; they delivered books from schools to the learners.

• Vulnerable learners were mapped and offered extended support including progress monitoring.

• School leaders provided instructional leadership by sharing links to access learning materials.

• Schools systematically organized dispatch of books to the learners in their homes.

• Teachers took up safeguarding responsibilities to protect the wellbeing of learners during the period of school closure.

STRATEGIES USED
WHEN REOPENING

• Home visits to share information with caregivers about school reopening, and encourage learners to return to school.

• Provision of materials such as books, pens and uniforms to vulnerable learners.

• Closer monitoring of COVID-19 protocols by assigning extra teachers to schools.

• Engagement of community leaders to share information about school reopening.

STRATEGIES USED
AFTER SCHOOL REOPENING

• Psychosocial support to learners through 'emotional dialogues... facilitated by the school leader'.

• Sharing information about school attendance with community leaders to facilitate tracking of learners who had not reported back.

• Leveraging peer learning to facilitate learning recovery.

THEMATIC CASE STUDY FINDINGS

FULL CASE STUDY FINDINGS
PARENTAL COLLABORATION

Most schools tried to engage caregivers in some ways.

• One school leader set up 'parent visitation groups' that were responsible for reaching out to caregivers, either in person or by phone, while schools were closed. The check-ins were to make sure children were aware of and following radio and TV lessons, and to check on their welfare.

• Another school leader set up 'zones' to identify teachers who lived nearby students, and assigned them households to visit.

• Teachers used WhatsApp forums to engage each other; this was particularly helpful in reaching remote or hard-to-reach families.

• Some teachers stated that they obtained permission from village leaders before approaching households.

• Teachers took up parental engagement responsibility personally.

• In some schools, the director of studies was in touch with caregivers to give them guidelines on home learning. The school provided guidelines, and the director of studies was nearby.

• Teachers visited homes to give learners materials from various online platforms.

• A key challenge was that some caregivers indicated that they never communicated with teachers.

• Teachers visited learners in their homes to deliver books and other instructional materials.

TEACHER COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND SCHOOL LEADER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

During school closures, some schools managed to keep running regular PLCs amongst their teachers. These were typically via phone conference or online.

• Through forums like WhatsApp, teachers were in touch with caregivers to provide support.

• Some school leaders created forums of engaging the whole school community to prepare for reopening.

• School leaders mobilized their teachers and held meetings to seek support in monitoring construction of classrooms that was ongoing in preparation for reopening.

• Through communities of practice (CoP), teachers interacted with their school leaders in preparing for school reopening.

• A key challenge was slump in PLC activities and direct communication on school reopening.

EQUITY –
THE ENABLERS

• Teachers identified learners to support and provided instructional materials to support learning continuity. In one school, they identified 80 children and supported them in small groups whilst adhering to COVID-19 prevention measures. The teachers also brought some books from school and delivered them to students at home. Teachers did this for the learners living in the most remote locations, with some teachers travelling by boat to reach children located on lake islands.

• Some schools allocated teachers to specific learners who lived nearby, even if they did not usually teach those learners when in school. Teachers were tasked with checking in on the wellbeing of learners, ensuring they had learning resources at home (i.e. through delivering textbooks and other paper-based materials), providing advice and guidance on studying, sharing radio timetables and supporting caregivers to ensure continuity of learning.

• Teachers in the same school reported also prioritizing the learners they knew struggled most with learning activities when in school.

• Some teachers reported giving students homework and monitoring progress based on completion of homework throughout school closures. They also reported following up with caregivers to ensure they were giving their children enough time to focus on learning activities in addition to their chores.

• Some teachers reported keeping track of safeguarding concerns and incidents during school closures.

EQUITY –
THE CHALLENGES

• Teachers reported that it was often difficult for them to find extra time to teach and reach vulnerable learners because they had their own responsibilties, such as family farms and educating their own children. Some teachers also had limited means to reach the students and needed to walk long distances or use public transport.

• There were delays in reporting students dropping out and being able to locate those students to encourage their return. Schools reported some learners finding permanent work, with others dropping out due to marriage, pregnancy or giving birth during closures.

• Lack of radio and TV presented challenges in accessing learning, especially for vulnerable learners. Teachers tried to mitigate this as much as possible by letting learners borrow their radios, televisions or phones where possible, but this did not ensure coverage for all learners.

• Some learners struggled to follow radio/TV lessons due to language barriers. They reported that teachers would speak too fast in English, making it difficult for them to keep up.

• Some learners and caregivers reported that they were not supported by any teachers. These caregivers and learners commented that no teachers or school leaders contacted them at all during closures, and they were left to devise their own learning plans.

RETURN TO SCHOOL/REDUCING DROPOUT

• Teachers sustained engagement of caregivers to ensure all learners returned to school.

• One approach to minimizing dropout was to follow up with learners who were identified as at risk of not returning. School leaders and teachers interviewed all reported visiting households to speak to caregivers and learners to encourage the most vulnerable back to school.

• Some teachers did home visits to pass information about school reopening and assess support needed for learners to report back.

• Another approach commonly cited to encourage return to school was working with community leaders. This involved different methods depending on location, but would typically involve community leaders encouraging return to school during community meetings, through radio adverts, posters and house visits.

• School leaders and teachers reported working closely with education authorities when children were identified as not returning to school. They would then work with authorities to encourage return to school.

• To encourage the return to school, psychosocial support was also put in place for vulnerable learners to help them navigate the return to school and alleviate any concerns or difficulties they may have.

• Some schools reported providing resources to the most vulnerable households to support return to school. This could include providing support for acquiring school uniforms, providing pens, notebooks and other materials that could encourage learners back.

• One key challenge reported when students returned was that during prolonged school closures, teachers reported that learners forgot the school routine and approach to learning, and it was difficult to initiate that routine again.