How Should We Teach In a Pandemic?

**Option One:**
Put health concerns first.

Remote learning harms children educationally and emotionally, particularly those with learning disabilities or who are already struggling in school. It makes our unequal education system even more unequal as children fall behind in their studies, go hungry, or are left without adult supervision and support.

### Actions
- Close schools and offer remote learning until vaccines are more available and we get much better control over this pandemic.
- Allow parents to choose either in-school or remote learning or a combination of the two, depending on their family's needs and risks.
- Teachers should be given the choice whether to teach remotely from home or in person at school.
- Employers should offer parental leave until the pandemic ends so all workers have time to help their children with school.

### Possible Drawbacks
- Children learn less and suffer emotionally when schools are closed.
- Expecting schools to organize this and stretched-thin teachers to do both remote and in-person instruction will lead to confusion and burnout.
- This invites chaos. Taking the proper precautions, teachers can work in person just as grocery store workers and police officers do.
- It is unfair to expect small businesses—many of them pounded financially by the pandemic—to provide this benefit.

### What’s the trade-off if we do that?

**Option Two:**
Put learning and emotional well-being first.

Many school districts lack funds to improve ventilation, hire additional staff, lower class sizes, or add other safeguards to often older, cramped facilities, putting children, teachers, and communities at risk.

### Actions
- Bring back the earliest grades first. Young children learn reading and other basic skills best with in-person instruction, and they are less likely to spread the virus if still young.
- Open schools to offer in-person instruction for special education students, low-income children, English language learners, and others at high risk due to remote instruction.
- Offer summer school and after-school classes to help those students who have fallen behind to catch up educationally.
- Create permanent enrichment programs, such as music and the arts, counseling, and mentoring programs, that give children who have suffered from poverty, racism, or other forms of abuse an equal chance at a good education.

### Possible Drawbacks
- Many older students are not showing up for online classes and risk falling behind academically. They may end up on academic trajectories in suspension groups that are even more likely to spread the virus.
- Remote teaching is hurting all students’ ability to learn. Singing out some for special treatment will create resentment and divide communities.
- Teachers already are exhausted by the demands of the pandemic and cannot be asked to do even more.
- Schools should stick to teaching reading, math, science, and other critical subjects. We ask too much of them as it is without demanding that they fix larger societal problems.

### What’s the trade-off if we do that?

**Option Three:**
Focus on children most likely to fall behind.

The pandemic has affected all students educationally and emotionally. To focus on only some would be unfair and would undermine broad support for public education.

### Actions
- Open schools with predictable five-day schedules and mandatory mask rules.
- Require teachers to teach online as other essential workers do.
- Invest in making schools safe by renting classroom space to allow better physical distancing and by improving ventilation and sanitization.
- Open schools but cancel sports, choir, and any activity that includes physical closeness, shouting, or singing, which can spread the virus.

### Possible Drawbacks
- Staying open may lead to more outbreaks, especially with more contagious variants of the virus now appearing.
- Some teachers, including many of the best and most experienced, would leave the profession rather than risk their and their families' health.
- Only wealthier districts would be able to afford such upgrades, leaving teachers and students in poorer areas in unsafe schools.
- Physical exercise and group activities are essential for children and are a major motivation for many students.

### What’s the trade-off if we do that?