



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	Possible Drawbacks
Close schools and offer remote learning until vaccines are more available and we get much better control over this pandemic.	Children learn less and suffer emotionally when schools are closed.
Allow parents to choose either in-school or remote learning or a combination of the two, depending on their family's needs and risks.	Expecting schools to organize this and stretched-thin teachers to do both remote and in-person instruction will lead to confusion and burnout.
Teachers should be given the choice whether to teach remotely from home or in person at school.	This invites chaos. Taking the proper precautions, teachers can work in person just as grocery store workers and police officers do.
Employers should offer parental leave until the pandemic ends so all workers have time to help their children with school.	It is unfair to expect small businesses—many of them pounded financially by the pandemic—to provide this benefit.
What else? What could we do, especially on a community level?	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	Possible Drawbacks
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 or fall seriously ill.	Many older students are not showing up for online classes and risk falling behind academically. They may end up gathering in unsupervised groups that are even more likely to spread the virus.
Open schools to offer in-person instruction for special education students, low-income children, English language learners, and others left behind by remote instruction.	Remote teaching is harming all students' ability to learn. Singling out some for special treatment will create resentment and divide communities.
Offer summer school and after-school classes to help those students who have fallen behind to catch up educationally.	Teachers already are exhausted by the demands of the pandemic and cannot be asked to do even more.
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.	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 else? What could we do, especially on a community level?	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	Possible Drawbacks
Open schools with predictable five-day schedules and mandatory mask rules.	Staying open may lead to more outbreaks, especially with more contagious variants of the virus now appearing.
Require teachers to teach onsite as other essential workers do.	Some teachers, including many of the best and most experienced, would leave the profession rather than risk their and their families' health.
Invest in making schools safe by renting classroom space to allow better physical distancing and by improving ventilation and sanitation.	Only wealthier districts would be able to afford such upgrades, leaving teachers and students in poorer areas in unsafe schools.
Open schools but cancel sports, chorus, and any activity that includes physical closeness, shouting, or singing, which can spread the virus.	Physical exercise and group activities are essential for children and are a major motivation for many students.
What else? What could we do, especially on a community level?	What's the trade-off if we do that?