



Initial education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: France

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19

Pre-existing resources in the education system appear to have facilitated some areas of France's initial response to the pandemic. Local collaboration is reported to have played an important role in France's response, with participants from the civic service (*service civique*) and other local volunteers. In addition, regional approaches, such as the Priority Education Networks (REP and REP+) and Educational Cities (*Cités Éducatives*) seem to have facilitated the delivery of additional support and resources to disadvantaged students. As France works to balance short-term responsiveness with ongoing strategic aims, priorities evolve. As elsewhere, a range of resources supporting distance education has been put in place for teachers and school leaders, but educators could benefit from more opportunities and spaces for professional collaboration, with, for example, a focus on enhancing digital skills. Finally, although disruptions to student assessment were considerable, the cancellation of examinations and use of continuous assessment could strengthen the support and knowledge needed to implement the ongoing Reform of the Baccalaureate, provided that France actively engages stakeholders in these changes.

This snapshot presents information originally published as part of the **Education Policy Outlook: France (2020)**, available at: www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-France-2020.pdf



The French education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 12 March 2020, France [announced the closure](#) of all educational institutions, from ECEC to tertiary level, as of 16 March 2020. The reopening of classes began on 11 May. Initial responses in light of the work of the *Education Policy Outlook* in 2020 in the context of this pandemic are:

1. **Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways:** During the closures, France required educational institutions to maintain pedagogical continuity using online materials. The [National Centre for Distance Education](#) organised 4-week learning blocks for 5-18 year-olds, accessible free of charge for teachers, students and families. [Eduscol](#), the [Canopé Network](#) and the websites of the regional administrations (academies) also have digital resource banks. At the same time, the Learning Nation (Nation Apprenante) campaign aimed to mobilise national and regional media, in particular France Télévisions and Radio France, to support student learning. The Ministry of National Education and Youth supported educators to use these tools through mobilising its network of digital education advisors and developing a training programme with tutorials and webinars. The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation also collated resources and information to support pedagogical continuity in higher education institutions. France cancelled the national end-of-cycle examinations (baccalauréat, brevet), using the average performance of students in assessments that took place before confinement to inform students' final grade. Higher education institutions either switched to online assessments or postponed examinations; other post-secondary national and institutional examinations have been postponed and/or adapted.
2. **Strengthening the internal world of the student:** In February, the Ministry of National Education and Youth issued guidelines for schools on pedagogical continuity with students in the event of closure.
3. **Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families:** Support for disadvantaged students has focused on: 1) the distribution of technological equipment; 2) more mentors and tutors for disadvantaged students mobilised through local volunteer networks; and 3) additional financial support for disadvantaged students during the summer holidays. The Learning Holidays initiative (Vacances apprenantes), which expects to benefit one million children, aims to redress the gaps in learning that may have accumulated during school closures and minimise the risk of increased student drop out. The initiative also aims to have a social impact by offering children a range of enriching experiences during school holidays.
4. **Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level:** Throughout the period of closures, educational institutions continued to provide emergency childcare for the children of essential workers, including during school holidays. This action was coordinated by schools and regional administrations, in collaboration with regional health agencies. In partnership with the national postal service (La Poste), schools distributed educational resources on a weekly basis to students without access to digital resources at home. The national online platform, I want to help (Je veux aider), was set up to connect local volunteers with charities addressing local needs, including childcare, tutoring and mentoring. Furthermore, approximately 25 000 young people (16-25 year-olds) participating in the national civic service programme (Service Civique) were similarly redeployed.
5. **Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** Student assessments conducted remotely during school closures were not used to inform final grades. However, examination boards would continue to take into account the students' attendance and engagement throughout the school year.



Table 1

Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)		France	Average	Min	Max
<i>Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)</i>					
1	Index of self-efficacy	-0.10	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2	Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	82.1%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
<i>Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)</i>					
3	Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	22.9%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4	Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	73.5%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced **before 22 April 2020**.

For more information visit: <http://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/>

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