

# Education professor outlines measures for meaningful education reform post-COVID

August 3 2021, by Mari-Len de Guzman

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

With Ontario elementary and secondary schools looking at a full return to in-person learning this September, the burden of keeping them open should not just fall on the school boards, according to global education

expert Prachi Srivastava.

"School level mitigation only works when there is robust community level mitigation," said Srivastava, a professor at Western's Faculty of Education, who has led the development of high-level policy briefs on COVID-19 [education](#) disruption for Think20, the global engagement group for the 2020 and 2021 G20 processes. Srivastava has also advised international agencies, and government and non-government organizations on global education policy.

Srivastava, who was the co-lead author for the [Ontario Science Table brief on education disruption](#) published on 4 June 2021, is also a co-author of a new Ontario Science Table Advisory, published July 19. The brief recommends that, barring catastrophic circumstances, schools should remain open for in-person learning.

"[The Science Table Advisory] really points to how important it is to treat education and schooling as an essential service, because that hasn't been done since March of 2020," Srivastava said. As a result, she added, Ontario ended up having the longest school closures in Canada, and one of the highest in North America and Europe.

The Science Table Advisory also recommends permanent measures to support the continued operation of schools—regardless of the pandemic—including vaccination of all eligible individuals, exclusion of sick students and staff, hand hygiene, adequate ventilation, and environmental cleaning.

Srivastava points out, however, that keeping schools open is not just a responsibility of schools. Societal measures must be in place to make sure other sectors that have an impact on [school](#) operations are being addressed and mitigated.

"We have to look at other social sectors, such as instituting paid sick days and potentially subsidizing businesses, other ways that may be seen as essential as well, so that we can protect schools.

"Using schools as pandemic control is not tenable; we are talking about 2.1 million children whose basic rights have been compromised, actually, for the last 18 months," Srivastava said.

Curricular reforms across the board must also be instituted to ensure that children are supported in the most meaningful way. According to Srivastava, these reforms include: broad-based reform from JK to grade 12 looking at parts of the curriculum that need to be lengthened, moved from last year to this year, or moved from this year to next year, and boosting literacy and numeracy skills for every grade; introducing psychosocial skills and programming for all grades; and implementing targeted initiatives for specialized help and assistance for children at schools and communities that have been most affected, whether they have come into the pandemic with existing vulnerabilities or have developed new vulnerabilities as a result of the pandemic.

"It's really very important to understand that simply opening the schools without, firstly, taking care of community level measures is not enough," Srivastava said. "Without significant curricular reform, we cannot actually have the kind of recovery that we need."

The Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table comprises scientific experts and health system leaders who evaluate and report on emerging evidence related to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of informing Ontario's response. Srivastava has been consulted as an education policy expert.

**More information:** Michelle Science et al, School Operation for the 2021-2022 Academic Year in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic,

(2021). [DOI: 10.47326/ocsat.2021.02.38.1.0](https://doi.org/10.47326/ocsat.2021.02.38.1.0)

Provided by University of Western Ontario

Citation: Education professor outlines measures for meaningful education reform post-COVID (2021, August 3) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-08-professor-outlines-meaningful-reform-post-covid.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.