



# BUILDING BACK FROM COVID-19:

*LESSONS LEARNED  
DURING COVID-19  
AND OVERCOMING  
EDUCATIONAL  
INEQUALITY IN  
THE AFTERMATH OF  
SCHOOL CLOSURES*



## POLICY QUESTION:

Considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the provision of public education in Brazil, what are the main policies that should be pursued by the different levels of government in the country to recover and remediate its impact?

## THE ISSUE:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on education globally, with extended school closures posing significant challenges, particularly in Brazil. These closures have not only disrupted the learning process but have also exacerbated existing educational inequalities. In Brazil, the impact was more severe among low-income families, where access to alternative learning resources was limited.

This situation led to a substantial increase in dropout rates and a marked decrease in academic achievement, as remote learning could not fully substitute for in-person education. The pandemic highlighted the need for robust educational policies and systems capable of addressing such disparities, especially in crisis situations. Therefore, understanding and addressing the consequences of these closures is vital for developing effective strategies to mitigate their long-lasting effects on educational inequality in Brazil.

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>1</sup>:

- Developing policies that specifically target the most vulnerable populations is crucial in preventing a rapid increase in educational inequality in Brazil, such as including specific goals in the revised *Plano Nacional de Educação (PNE)* or establishing nationwide parameters via the upcoming *Sistema Nacional de Educação (SNE)*. As highlighted in another one of our policy briefs, it is evident that low-income families have been disproportionately impacted by the repercussions of COVID-19, such as income shortages resulting in food insecurity and challenges in meeting their basic needs.

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<sup>1</sup> This policy brief was developed by Filipe Recch, a postdoctoral researcher of the Lemann Foundation Programme for the Public Sector at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, and its content and policy recommendations reflect contributions from members of the Lemann Foundation Programme team, Lia Pessoa, and Anna Petherick. Translation by Julia Sampaio.

- Hence, neglecting to prioritise these populations also significantly heightens the chances of educational disparities widening. Implementing well-tailored strategies, such as informational nudging through targeted text messages to low-income families, can play a vital role in mitigating this risk. By adopting policies that directly address the needs and challenges faced by vulnerable groups, there is a greater opportunity to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on education and foster greater equity in access to quality learning opportunities.
- Establishing education systems that prioritise the pedagogical use of data is essential for decision-making and policy development, particularly in recovering from learning losses during the pandemic. Key points include comprehensive data collection, effective analysis and interpretation, targeted intervention strategies, early warning systems, collaboration among stakeholders, privacy considerations, and continuous evaluation. By leveraging data in a pedagogical context, decision-makers can make informed choices, allocate resources effectively, and provide targeted support to enhance educational quality and ensure equitable opportunities for students.
- Establishing the *Sistema Nacional de Educação (SNE)* as a coordinating institution is crucial to ensure equitable provision of quality public education across Brazil. By building upon successful initiatives like Fundeb, BNCC, and PNLD, the National Education System can foster coordination, equity, and improved educational outcomes. It is important, however, to consider the challenges such as strengthening federative coordination and involving diverse stakeholders.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The immediate urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic has lessened in global discourse, yet its profound effects continue to permeate various socioeconomic sectors. Within the context of Brazil, this is particularly palpable among low-income families and the educational sector. Despite the reduced prominence of COVID-19 in current discussions, it remains imperative for policymakers to address its lingering impacts.

Some critical questions are even more relevant: How can Brazil address the educational inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic? What strategies can be developed to support low-income households that face the most severe repercussions? And how can insights from this crisis be integrated into future policy frameworks?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments globally were compelled to adopt policies restricting people's mobility to curb the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Prominently, school closures were implemented because educational institutions were identified as potential super-spreaders. Such measures aimed to protect students and educational professionals from increased exposure and to mitigate the risk of the virus cascading through communities at large.

By effectively stopping school activities altogether, at least for a period, and then moving to remote learning setups, school closures directly affected learning opportunities and reduced academic achievement. Early estimates of the impact of such policies show that students were expected to start the 2020-2021 academic year with learning gains as low as 40% when compared to previous academic years (Kuhfeld et al., 2020), due to the limited learning opportunities. Along the same lines, studies developed by the World Bank show that school closures meant for students the loss of 0.3 to 1.1 years of schooling on average (Azevedo et al., 2021). Hence, understanding the impact of school closures is central to developing a policy agenda to mitigate its negative effects, especially in countries where school closure policies were in place for longer.

Brazil is an international outlier when it comes to school closure policies – only Saudi Arabia had longer periods of required closures for all its schools (Recch et al., 2022). According to data gathered by the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT), Brazil had 433 days of school closures, as shown in figure 1. To fulfil their electoral campaign commitment, Lula's newly elected government must prioritise reducing the effects of these closures, as they can further increase educational inequalities in the country. They intend to do so by developing a mitigation strategy that runs parallel to regular education.

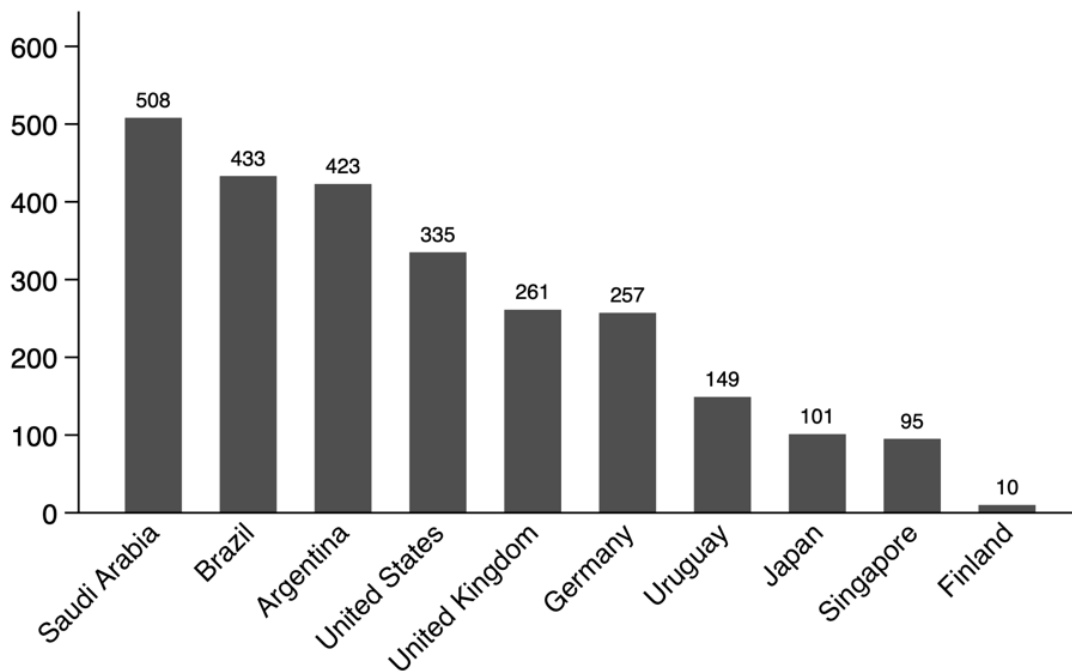


Figure 1: Number of days with required school closures by country. Source: OxCGRT

Similarly to what has been found in studies globally, school closures and remote learning negatively affected schooling in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study focused on the state of São Paulo found that under remote learning schemes, the dropout risk increased by 365% in the state. Additionally, test scores dropped by 0.32 standard deviations, equivalent to reaching only 27.5% of learning when compared to in-person lessons, a drop in learning levels even worse than those found in international studies (Lichand et al., 2022). It is important to remember that São Paulo had the shortest duration of school closures in the country, as indicated by the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT), which will be discussed further and shown in Figure 7. Therefore, the dropout rate projections for São Paulo may not accurately reflect the impact of closures in many parts of the country, as it is likely to be higher in states with longer periods of school closures.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted some long-lasting issues with the Brazilian public education. The lack of coordination coming from the Federal Government to create an organised response against the pandemic (Costin and Coutinho, 2022) showed very clearly the ways in which this role is central for the development of equitable policies across the country, especially during a crisis. Even though cooperation between levels of government is a key principle of Brazilian federalism, there are no formal governmental institutions that aim to assure this when it comes to educational policies.

Alongside issues of national policy coordination, the information systems currently in place to monitor and evaluate education revealed shortcomings. During the pandemic it was necessary to track students

to monitor progress or to track use and access to remote education (Recch et al., 2022). The data systems that exist at the national level, and most of the subnational ones, do not provide real-time information or data that is geared towards pedagogical use (Costin and Coutinho, 2022). During the pandemic, research institutions (public and private) had to react quickly to provide governments with the necessary information to develop countermeasures. Hence, the development of systems that can make these data more readily available, as proposed by Recch et al. (2022), is key in the recovery and policy learning from COVID-19, such that Brazil's education system may be much better prepared for various potential future disruptions.

In this document, we provide policy recommendations and evidence supporting them based on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we do not dive into the degree of detail that would be needed for a comprehensive design and for the successful implementation of each of these policies, we provide a framework that can be used to build upon, into which such nuance can be filled in. We divide the policies in three main groups: (1) short-term policies that try to alleviate the immediate impact of school closures, especially for the most vulnerable populations; (2) medium-term policies that aim at structuring data and information to support pedagogical decisions; and (3) the long-term structuring of the *Sistema Nacional de Educação* (National System of Education) with the role of coordinating policies at the national level.

## 2. BLAVATNIK SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT DATA REGARDING COVID-19 IN BRAZIL

Building on the results of previous working papers about Brazil,<sup>2</sup> we report findings from two main sets of surveys and Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT). The surveys provide information related to the Brazilian population and its perceptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in various topics. For this policy brief we are focusing on perceptions related to the effects of the pandemic on education.

The OxCGRT collects systematic information related to governmental policies related to the pandemic<sup>3</sup>. Again, we focus on data collected regarding school closures as a countermeasure to curb the spread of the virus.

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<sup>2</sup> See A. Petherick et al., Do Brazil's COVID-19 Government Response Measures Meet the WHO's Criteria for Policy Easing?, BSG-WP-2020/033 (2020), available at <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/do-brazils-covid-19-government-response-measures-meet-whos-criteria-policy>; Brazil's Fight against COVID-19: Risk, Policies, and Behaviours, BSG-WP-2020/036 (2020), available at <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/brazils-fight-against-covid-19-risk-policies-and-behaviours>.

<sup>3</sup> For more details see Hale, Thomas, Noam Angrist, Beatriz Kira, Anna Petherick, Toby Phillips, and Samuel Webster. "Variation in government responses to COVID-19." (2020) available at <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/BSG-WP-2020-032-v14.1.pdf>

## 2.1. ABOUT THE OXFORD COVID-19 GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TRACKER (OXCGR)

The different policy responses were tracked from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022, covering more than 180 countries and coded into 23 indicators, such as school closures, travel restrictions and vaccination policies. Government policies were recorded on a scale of intensity, to reflect the extent of government action, and scores were aggregated into a suite of indices.

## 2.2. ABOUT THE SURVEYS

The surveys referred to in this policy brief were conducted over five waves. The first three were over the phone with at least 200 respondents living in each of these cities: Fortaleza, Goiânia, Manaus, Porto Alegre, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, São Paulo, and (in rounds 2 and 3) also Belém. The first round was conducted in May 2020 (N = 1,654), the second from mid-July to mid-September 2020 (N = 1,861), and the third from the start of April through to the end of May 2021 (N = 1,873).

The surveys used stratified sampling by age, sex, income, and education level. Phone numbers were randomly selected for each city from a sampling frame of hundreds of thousands of landline and mobile phone numbers, and the survey company was instructed to call non-respondents back at least three times more before moving on to another randomly selected telephone number.

The fourth (N = 2,071) and fifth (N = 2,969) waves were conducted online rather than over the phone in 2022, between the months of April and May, and July and August, respectively. All Brazilian regions were targeted, and the surveys used stratified sampling by age, sex, income, educational level within the five regions of Brazil. More details about the surveys can be found in the Appendix.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. INEQUALITY IN LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

As mentioned, the prolonged school closures during the pandemic directly affected learning opportunities for students. However, access to alternative learning opportunities, that went beyond school resources, were unequally available to students, especially in the Global South (Hossain, 2021). In Brazil, students in vulnerable conditions had more difficulties getting access to learning facilities and infrastructure than students from more affluent families (Azevedo et al., 2022). Thus, it is expected that students in these conditions have experienced greater learning losses during the pandemic.

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<sup>4</sup>The University of Oxford's ethical review body, CUREC, approved the study.

Our survey data supports this conclusion, as depicted in Figure 2, which shows the evolution across three survey waves of the percentage of students who received study materials at home, divided into low and high-income families. While the majority of students in both groups received some form of support material, it was only in the third wave that low-income families received more materials than high-income families. This trend coincides with the fact, highlighted in Figure 3, that students from high-income families returned to school earlier than those from low-income families.

Additionally, it is important to note that according to INEP's 2021 socioeconomic index, over 70% of high-income students are enrolled in private schools, while the proportion drops to less than 25% for low-income students. This disparity in access to private education further contributes to the potential increase in educational inequality during and after school closures.

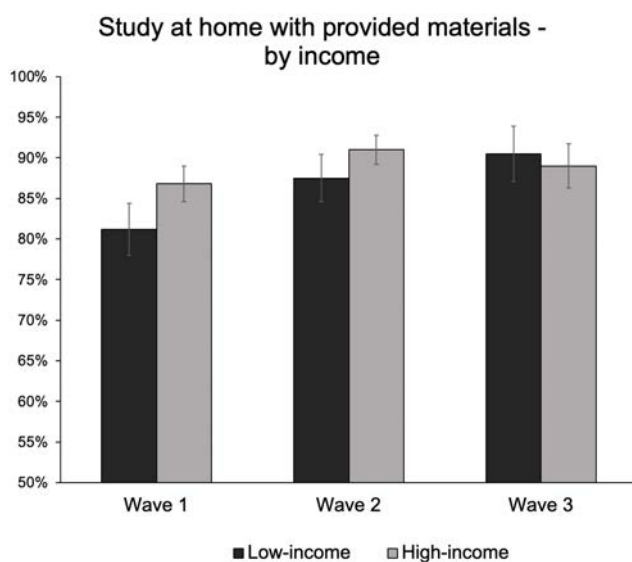


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents with access to remote learning materials by income and survey wave. Source: OxCGRT Survey

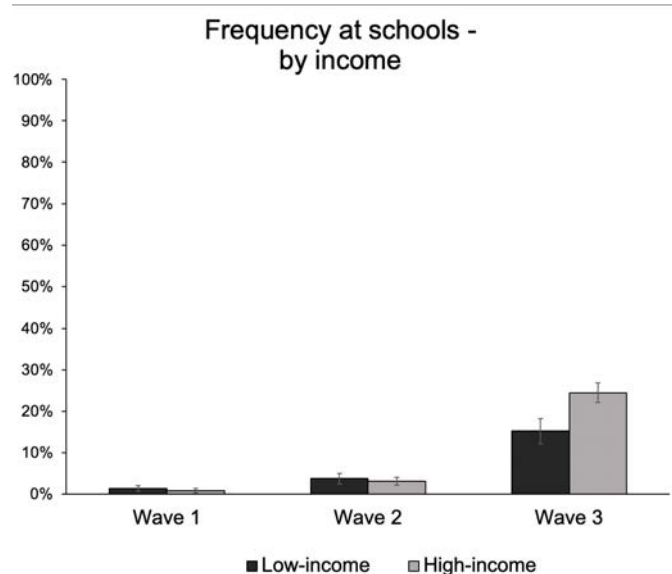


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents that had access to in-person learning by income and wave. Source: OxCGRT Survey

During the first two waves, that happened on May 2020 and from mid-July to mid-September 2020, the return to in-person learning was very low for both groups. In wave 3, collected between April and May 2021, however, it is possible to see that students in high-income families have started the return to schools earlier and in a faster rate than low-income ones. This scenario alone contributes to a potential widening of educational inequalities.



Therefore, we argue that, in the short-term, the Brazilian government, both in the national and subnational levels, should develop education policies targeted at low-income families. These policies need not only to remediate the direct impact of COVID-19 on schooling, but also indirect ones that might not be as easily perceived.

Using the same nationally representative survey, now focusing on the fourth and fifth waves, we found that caregivers from low-income families are *less* worried about the impact of COVID-19 on schooling than high-income ones. Figure 4 shows families' perception of schooling quality during the pandemic as compared to before it.

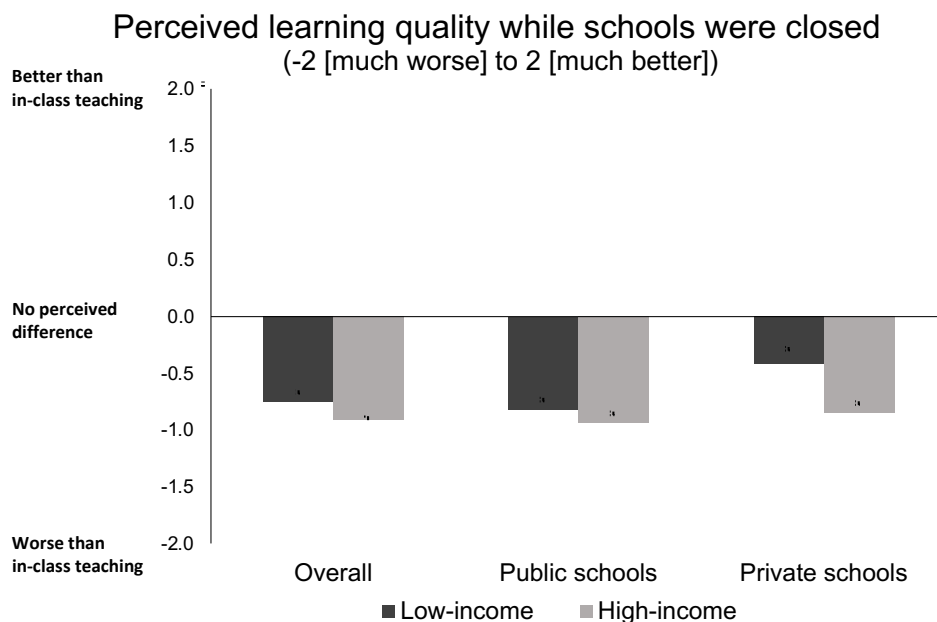


Figure 4: Perceived learning quality of remote learning as compared to in-person learning by income and school system. Source: OxCGRT Survey

It is clear that all families perceive schooling during the pandemic as worse than before, be it because of school closures or remote learning. However — counterintuitively, and crucially for effective policymaking — families with higher income, that on average had access to more schooling resources even when schools were closed, have a more negative perception of schooling during the pandemic. This is particularly alarming if we consider the importance of parental involvement in schooling. It is important to stress that the measures we provide here are already considering differences in frequency of learning and a basic measure of quality of remote study material students had access to. In other words, our models consider such variables and the estimates we provide are good indicators about parental expectations and perceptions.

Through a study reviewing 169 papers, Fiskerstrand (2022) shows that parental involvement has a positive effect on children's mathematics learning outcomes and, even more strongly, on children's expectations and beliefs regarding learning on the subject. Perhaps more importantly, the author also shows studies that find positive influence of parental involvement on learning on different groups of students (ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic background). Therefore, an important strategy for Brazilian governments to pursue is to work with low-income families and bring awareness to the impact of COVID-19 on schooling and the positive benefits for children of returning to school. One cost-effective way of doing so is to use "nudging" to bring awareness to the issue.

Informational nudging – understood here as an attempt to influence someone's behaviour with a specific goal – can be particularly effective in educational scenarios. In a meta-analysis focusing on studies that test the relationship between behavioural nudges and education, Damgaard and Nielsen (2018) show that in situations where active decision-making is possible, informational nudges have positive effects on behaviour. The authors also show that students in low-income families tend to benefit the most from these interventions.

Another study, a randomised control trial conducted in partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, tested the impact of a postcard "nudge" on reducing absenteeism in students. Two messages were sent to guardians in October 2014, one with general encouragement and the other with specific information about the student's attendance history. A control group received no postcard. The study found that the postcard reduced absenteeism by 2.4% but there was no difference between the two messages (Rodfers et al., 2017).

This strategy is already being tested in Brazil with positive results. Lichand and Christen (2021) show that nudges sent directly to the students' phones reduced the dropout risk in schools that already had online activities prior to the pandemic. The authors conducted a cluster-randomised control trial with 18,256 high school students in Brazil to test the impact of behavioural nudges on dropout risk. Nudges consisted of encouragement messages sent as text messages, aimed at having students participate in remote learning activities and maintaining their motivation to stay enrolled in school until in-person classes return. The study found that nudges reduced dropout risk by 26% over the course of the school year, with higher impacts for high-risk students. The study also found that framing the messages positively led to higher impacts and that alluding to peer motivation had no additional effect.

These results suggest that behavioural nudges can help mitigate the increase in student dropouts during school closures. Hence, thinking about specific well-targeted policies to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 in the short-term, informational nudging bringing awareness to low-income families might prove an important strategy.

## 4. EDUCATION DATA NEEDS

Regardless of having a strong culture of producing, disseminating, and using administrative data in education, Brazil struggled to collect and organise reliable and timely information to use during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Recch et al., 2022). Institutions such as *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP)* or the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) provide invaluable data and information to be used in policy planning and implementation throughout the country. However, these data are often lagged and designed to be used for administrative purposes only.

Take the Index of Development of Basic Education (IDEB), for example. Calculated by INEP since 2007, IDEB provides a great picture of the scenario of Brazilian public education in all levels of government. The Index summarises assessment data and repetition and dropout rates into one easily comprehensible reference that is measured biannually. As such, it is possible to easily track trends over time and it provides a good reference for the overall development of Brazilian public education.

Another good example of valuable dataset for educational planning, also organised by INEP, is the Brazilian School Census. These data are collected annually and provide information regarding enrolment, staffing, and other school related information. Based on the School Census, repetition and dropout rates used in IDEB are calculated, alongside various other indicators. Additionally, these data are used as a reference for budget transfers from the federal government to lower levels of government in the country.

There are at least two main issues with the use of these data for pedagogical purposes, however. Given the scope of the endeavour to collect them given the size of the country and its population, the systems that govern data collection are strict and rigid. Adaptations are hard to make and might even not be welcomed, as they could interfere with the longitudinal time trends being measured. This makes the possible use of these data quite restricted to the scope defined beforehand. Initiatives such as IBGE's National Household Sample Survey (Pnad), that created a strategy to collect more timely data for the use during the pandemic (Costin and Coutinho, 2022), are central in a time of crisis. Nonetheless, the design of information collection that can be adapted in these contexts is key to guarantee that, in another potential crisis, there are ways to keep track of essential information for decision-making.

Another example of adaptive and flexible data collection initiative is Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), a large-scale household-based assessment conducted in India since 2005 (Recch et al., 2022). ASER is an annual household-based survey conducted in rural India that aims to provide data on the basic reading and arithmetic abilities of children aged 3-16. The survey is conducted by trained volunteers who visit rural households, asking children to perform simple tasks such as reading a sentence,

solving an arithmetic problem, and asking household members questions about their educational backgrounds and household assets. The number of volunteers varies from year to year and depends on the coverage area, but it typically involves several thousand volunteers working in teams to cover a large number of households in a short period of time. These volunteers are trained by ASER coordinators before they begin collecting data to ensure that the data collected is of high quality and that the survey is conducted consistently across different regions. For this reason, ASER is widely regarded as one of the largest citizen-led assessments of education in the world. The simple approach and community-based collection made ASER one of the few systems to document real-time education related data during the pandemic.

The second, and perhaps more important issue considering the potential impact on learning, is that these data are not pedagogically driven, but more administrative or accountability purposed. Even in standard times, outside of a crisis such as the pandemic, we need information that is specifically developed to support teaching and learning, pedagogically referenced. Chico Soares, former president of INEP, has advocated for the use of formative learning assessment, for example, for many years.

Going back to IDEB and analysing the 2021 results, that were published on 16 September 2022, we find something that might sound surprising. Figures 5 and 6 show the historical results for all three grade-levels with IDEB results. The solid lines show actual measured results while the dashed lines show the respective targets for each grade level by year.

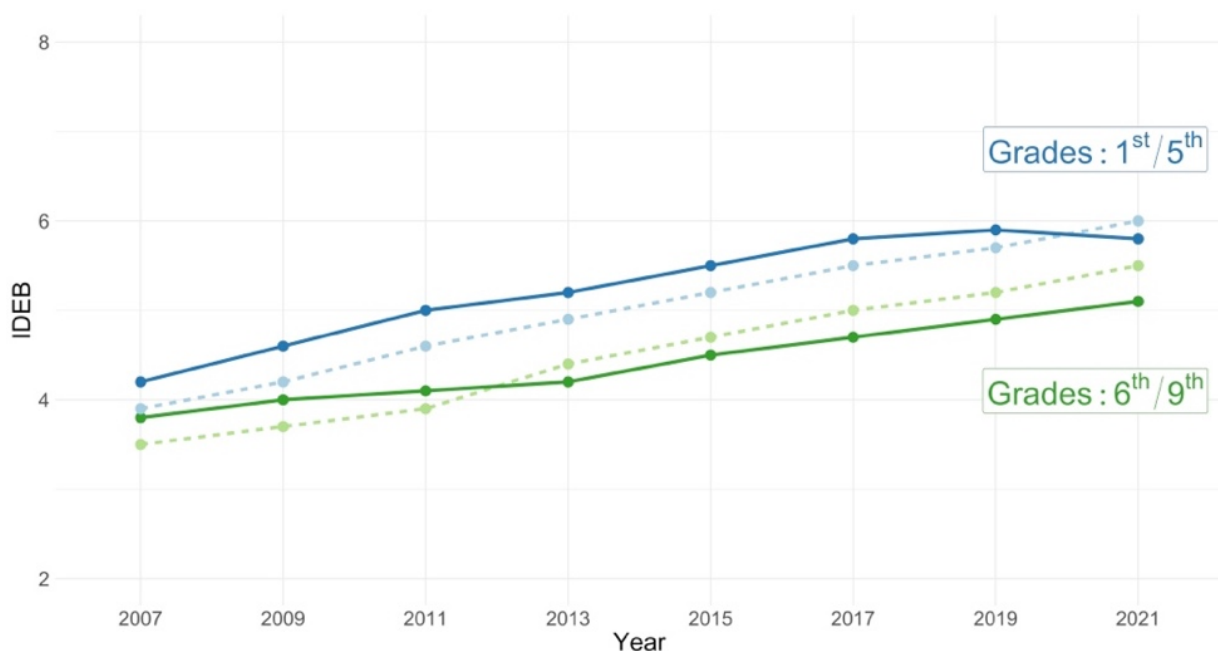


Figure 5: IDEB results for first to fifth grade and sixth to ninth grade students in all schools by year. Source: INEP/Brazil

Given that during the pandemic schools were effectively closed for a time, it was expected that learning indicators would have dropped, similarly to what happened in other parts of the world. Additionally, it was also expected that remote learning would have impacted students negatively, as mentioned earlier. That is not what IDEB 2021 results show. It is possible to see that only for the first grade-level (1st to 5th grades) there is a drop in the indicator, whereas for grades 6th to 9th there was an increase in results as compared to previous years and for 10th to 12th grades there was no change.

There are some claims that attribute this positive result, given the context, to an effective work from departments of education throughout Brazil. We argue, however, that, besides the tremendous effort made by departments of education, these results are more likely related to how IDEB is calculated and the way the pandemic influenced these results.

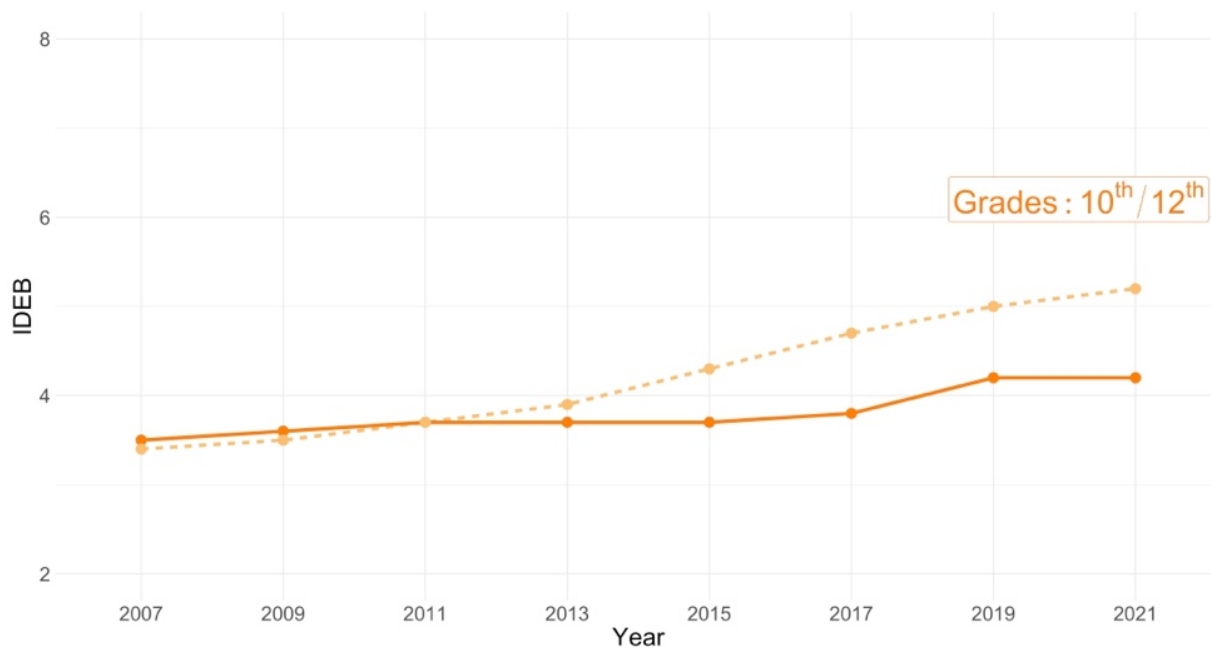


Figure 6: IDEB results for tenth to twelfth grade students in all schools by year. Source: INEP/Brazil

Recall that IDEB considers both test scores and repetition and dropout rates. Hence, changes in these basic statistics will, obviously, affect the index. Because of school closures and the challenges around remote learning, students were not held back in grades during the pandemic. This directly affected the calculation of IDEB, inflating the scores. Additionally, only schools with more than 80% of students taking part on *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* (Saeb) tests have IDEB results calculated. According to a technical document released by the Ministry of Education (MEC)<sup>5</sup>, 33.1% of schools that offer 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See here:

[https://download.inep.gov.br/educacao\\_basica/porta1\\_ideb/planilhas\\_para\\_download/2021/nota\\_informativa\\_ide\\_b\\_2021.pdf](https://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_basica/porta1_ideb/planilhas_para_download/2021/nota_informativa_ide_b_2021.pdf)

grades, 36.8% that offer 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades, and staggering 60.1% of that offer 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades, did not have their IDEB calculated for 2021. Hence, the results may be unreliable due to another potential bias, as the students who participated in the test may have been less affected by school closures and COVID-19, leading to an upward bias in the in-test scores and painting a more optimistic picture than the reality.

Going forward, the Federal Government should support states and municipalities, either financially or technically, to develop information systems that have pedagogical use as its main focus. Ideally, these systems should be able to track student level information that reports to teachers and other school professionals the academic needs of these students. Additionally, national, and subnational level data should be made available to researchers, observing individual level information restrictions, to promote the development of studies that can shed light on the setbacks caused by the pandemic. These studies, made in partnerships with departments of education, can provide clarity for decisions regarding policies to remediate the impact of COVID-19 but also be crucial to further develop our educational systems and promote equitable learning.

## 5. NATIONAL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION (SISTEMA NACIONAL DE EDUCAÇÃO - SNE)

The Brazilian Constitution clearly states that municipal, state, and federal governments should cooperate to provide public education. Regardless of this mandate, during the pandemic, the federal government did not act as a central coordinating institution providing references or guidelines to subnational governments on how to tackle the repercussions of the pandemic on the provision of public education. This complete inaction created the potential to increase educational inequalities across the country, as states and municipalities have different levels of state capacity to adapt and respond in a time of crisis.

On top of having have one of the longest periods of school closures in the world, as shown in Figure 1, the variation within the country and its subnational units is vast. Using data from the OxCGRT, it is possible to see how different states responded to the pandemic when it comes to school closures. Figure 7 shows the number of running days with required school closures in all states of Brazil . The wide spread in number of days closed, going from 179 in São Paulo to 612 in Mato Grosso, is a perfect example of why Brazil needs a National System of Education. Again, considering the potential impact on learning opportunities, the vastly different number of days without in-person learning affected students unequally. If municipal level administrations are included and the differences in action to accommodate remote learning is considered, this scenario is even more worrisome (Recch et al., 2022).

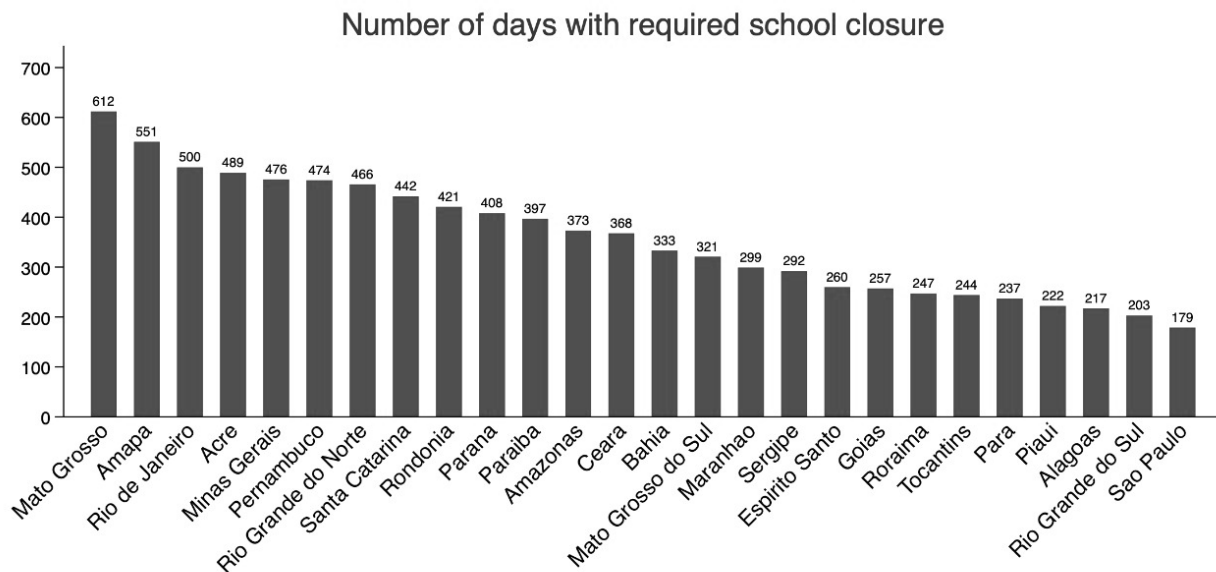


Figure 7: Number of days with required school closure by state in Brazil. Source: OxCGRT

The role of the National System of Education is exactly to coordinate action between all levels of government in the provision of public education. It is important to stress that the National System of Education has been part of the educational debate for decades and is included in the current National Plan of Education (Plano Nacional de Educação – PNE). The legislation has been in debate in the Congress, having been approved by the Senate already, and is now in the Chamber of Deputies. The mere approval of the law, however, does not guarantee its implementation or the success of the policy.

Brazil needs to build on its previous successes on initiatives that aim to create a sense of coordination and equity in the provision of public education nationally. The *Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica e de Valorização dos Profissionais da Educação (Fundeb)*, a funding mechanism with a redistributive characteristic is a clear example. Recently revised, Fundeb represents the style of action a National System of Education can strive to develop. The Base Nacional Curricular Comum (BNCC) and Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático (PNLD) are two initiatives that can also serve as references.

Fernando Abrúcio addresses the challenges of establishing SNE in comprehensive research, publicly presented in 2021. He reinforces the critical need for stronger coordination and collaboration across all levels of government for the effective implementation of public policies, particularly focusing on the education sector in Brazil. Abrúcio emphasizes the role of federative governance and its interplay with different ministries and federal government agencies. Federative forums and systems are highlighted as essential platforms for strengthening policy coalitions, facilitating information exchange, and fostering joint learning and policy dissemination.

Abrúcio's research further underscores the importance of active societal engagement and the inclusion of various stakeholders in the policy-making process. The research presents several key challenges to be addressed, such as strengthening the role of the Union in federative coordination, improving decision-making processes, and tailoring the logic of the systems to the unique needs of each public policy sector. His conclusions suggest that a concerted effort in addressing these challenges can lead to more effective and inclusive public policy, particularly in the realm of education.

Finally, the potential impact of a National System of Education goes beyond specific cases and projects. Academic literature shows that in states where there are signs of higher levels of cooperation between state and municipalities, there are also higher levels of student achievement scores (Abrúcio et al., 2016, Segatto and Abrúcio, 2016, Carnoy et al., 2017, Costin and Coutinho, 2022). The coordinative role of the federal government, supported by *União Nacional dos Dirigentes Municipais de Educação (Undime)* and *Conselho Nacional de Secretários de Educação (Consed)*, has the potential to significantly improve the overall quality of public education in Brazil.

## 6. CLOSING REMARKS

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted education worldwide, with its impacts being particularly severe in the context of public education. The imminent challenges of school closures, remote learning, and the difficulties in returning to in-person learning have brought unprecedented changes to the educational landscape. These changes have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable populations, underlining the urgent need for targeted recovery efforts.

In Brazil, the upcoming revision of the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (National Education Plan) in 2024 presents a crucial opportunity to incorporate strategies and goals aimed at reversing the growing educational disparities. This revision process offers a platform to embed policy goals specifically designed to address the inequalities that have deepened due to the pandemic. It is imperative that the revised plan includes clear goals and measures to support the most affected students and ensure equitable access to quality education.

Moreover, the establishment of the *Sistema Nacional de Educação* (National Education System) is a pivotal step towards a more coordinated and equitable education framework across the country. This system can play a vital role in harmonising educational policies and practices at various governmental levels, thereby ensuring a consistent and high-quality educational experience for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background or region of the country they're in.

By seizing these opportunities, Brazil can make significant strides in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on its education system and lay a stronger foundation for educational equity and excellence. It is a moment for concerted action and commitment to ensure that the lessons learned during the pandemic are translated into effective policies that safeguard the future of education in Brazil.



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