Part 1: How We Have Changed

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted us overnight and changed us, perhaps, forever. As an organisation, we had to adapt, become agile, and innovate, all the while collaborating with our Students, our communities and long-standing partners. With the upheaval and disruption that we witnessed, we, at Teach For India, realized that we need to continue doing what we had been doing, but do it differently.

Students and families from low-income communities across the world have taken the biggest hit. According to a UNICEF report, the pandemic forced nearly 1.6 billion learners out of schools across 190 countries, which is 94% of the overall student population. 300 million children in India have been affected by school closures (UNESCO data dashboard).

Prolonged school closures have serious implications, extending beyond learning including increased child exploitation, lower nutrition with constrained mid day meals, social and emotional issues (BCG report).

With the well-being of our Students, Fellows and Staff in mind, we were one of the first few organizations to shift to the virtual realm even before the lockdown was imposed. Despite the challenge, it has been heartening to see our community come together and support one another. Over the past 2 years, we have shifted from an in-person Fellowship to a blended (online and in-person) Fellowship model focused on supporting the immediate needs of our Students’ families, while continuing to work towards an excellent education through a blended learning approach.

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<td>Classroom teaching</td>
<td>Online teaching</td>
<td>Blended Learning</td>
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Part 2: Big Shifts in Our Work

a) For our Students: As soon as the lockdown was announced, our immediate response was to understand the impact it would have on our children and their families in terms of their well-being and financial condition. We ran surveys, enlisted the help of our Fellows and requested support from our partner organisations to help distribute ration and groceries thereby providing immediate relief to the communities that we serve, where many parents belong to the informal sector. Through the relentless efforts of many stakeholders, we have been able to support close to 13,000 families.

We, simultaneously, created a task force to ensure that our Students continue learning. Aligned on the need to proceed with a blended learning approach, we focused on synchronous and asynchronous learning to maximize Student outcomes. Once we were able to ensure their immediate needs were met, we started focusing on their access to a stable internet connection and a device to enable online learning. 92% of our students have access to devices and 68% are attending classes online and in-person.

b) For our Fellows: Our Fellows have demonstrated incredible agility ever since the lockdown was announced. From a 100% in-person classroom teaching Fellowship, we have evolved to a blended Fellowship. With their own challenges to face, our Fellows have selflessly been connecting with their Students, checking on their well-being, and leading their classrooms, schools and communities at a heightened level of leadership.

Our recruitment process also moved online as the health of our candidates and Staff is of utmost importance. Our 2020 cohort was the first to experience our first-ever virtual Institute, a big shift from the 5-week residential program that we have had for the past decade. To ensure continuous
support, we are learning, engaging and connecting with each other through alternate platforms.

c) For our Staff: Our Staff has been working tirelessly to identify and implement ways to support the virtual nature of our Fellowship, as well as other areas including our work with Alumni, our Innovation Cell initiatives and more. Across all verticals, initially, teams reprioritized work to support the immediate needs of our community that stemmed from the impact of the pandemic, which included focusing on the well-being of Students, families, Fellows, Alumni as well as Staff. We have since reimagined our processes and reevaluated our overall goals to enable our work to continue in 2022-23.

d) For our Alumni: Our 3,800 Alumni have been instrumental in helping us face this crisis. We were able to collaborate with many of their organizations to support our children, Fellows, Staff and the overall Alumni community. Many great initiatives were launched by our Alumni to directly impact our children, their families and the larger ecosystem.

e) For our families, communities & larger ecosystem: We are engaging with our Students’ parents through in-person and virtual PTA meetings, and staying in touch with the schools we operate in, to stay updated on and support their plans for reopening. We have also been able to collaborate with our Teach For All network partners to learn and share best practices as we are all facing similar challenges. We continue to work closely with NGO and government partners to fight this crisis.
Part 3: Our Work in The Coming Months, A New Future

Our highest priority is the safety of our community. We will continue to monitor recommendations from multiple sources and will input those into our safety measures accordingly.

As schools begin to slowly open, we look forward to resuming stronger and better, than ever before. For the Fellowship, in particular, this will mean not only resuming our work in-person and on-ground, but also continuing to leverage technology in new and exciting ways to maximize our Students’ learning. In other words, we believe that the future is blended and are striving to accelerate learning outcomes through this approach. You can read more on our early insights and learnings with blended learning, and the role technology has played in providing a modern day education in the white paper- **Blended Learning: A Digital Equalizer** that we published.

**NOW MORE THAN EVER** we need leaders at all levels of the system to bridge the divide and end the inequities heightened by the pandemic. In spite of everything that we have faced, we believe that this is a **huge opportunity for us to REIMAGINE EDUCATION, especially for those most vulnerable and, therefore, most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.**
Here are our key takeaways:

1. **Teachers matter!** - Even though the world is moving towards digital-first learning, teachers remain paramount in providing an excellent education and bridge the gap between students, technology and learning practices.

2. **Technology can enhance learning for children** - Technology can allow us to personalise learning, deepen practices and increase accessibility.

3. **We need to reimagine education** - The pandemic has created an opportunity to reimagine a new, fundamentally different education system - where children come to school to develop the skills and values to live their greatest lives and uplift the lives of others. For this, we need to start with prioritizing safe reopening of schools to build back better and bridge learning losses.

**REFERENCES**