

Policy Notes (Responding to COVID-19)

Republic of Korea

1. Efforts to Reopen Schools with Online Classes

(1) Postponement of School Openings and Providing Online Classes

- **(Decision to postpone school opening)** After the infectious disease risk alert level was raised to "Serious" on February 23, education authorities decided to postpone the starting date of the new semester from March 2 to April 9 as a preemptive measure.
- **(Decision to offer online classes)** The government decided to offer online classes to students as a means of ensuring continuity in learning and protecting the health and safety of all students. Consequently, as of April 9, 860,000 middle and high school students started taking online classes, and by April 20, all 5.34 million students of elementary, middle and high schools nationwide took online classes as part of the official curriculum.

(2) Systematic Preparation for Online Classes

- **(Expanding infrastructure)** The Korean government decided to use online classes as part of the official education curriculum and expanded necessary infrastructure and released guidelines to minimize confusion at schools. Two sets of the Learning Management System (LMS) platforms ([KERIS e-Learning Site](#) for elementary school students and [EBS Online Class](#) for middle and high school students) were established, each allowing the concurrent access of 3 million students. Considering that lower graders in elementary schools could have difficulties in accessing online classes, the Korea Educational Broadcasting System (EBS) increased the number of its TV channels from seven to 12.
- **(Connecting and expanding online content)** Approximately 50,000 content materials (43,000 for EBS Online Class and 5,500 for the e-Learning Site) were secured to ensure diversity in online classes. Through public-private cooperation, content from the private sector was made available on public platforms free of charge.

- **(Improving related systems)** Education authorities announced guidelines for online classes in elementary, middle, and high schools on March 27 and provided additional guidelines on managing attendance, evaluation, and school records on April 7 to ensure that the same administration, attendance, and achievement assessment rules apply to online classes.
- **(Enhancing teachers' competency)** Before the initiation of online classes, education authorities shared best practices with 495 online class pilot schools; created a volunteer group consisting of 181 teachers named "Teacher-On"; provided support through the Community of 10,000 Representative Teachers and other teacher learning communities in order to help teachers improve their ICT competency.

(3) Measures to Narrow the Gap in Online Access

- **(Subsidies for devices and Internet subscription fees)** To ensure no student is left behind in taking online classes as part of the official school curriculum, [the Ministry of Education](#) provided free smart device rental services and subsidies for Internet subscription fees in cooperation with the Ministry of Science and ICT; Statistics Korea; local governments; 17 city and provincial education offices; and private sector companies such as Samsung and LG.
- **(Providing customized support for disadvantaged students)** For students that may have difficulty in taking regular online classes, education authorities provided customized online classes suited to the different situations of schools and students. Since lower graders in elementary school are still early in their development stage, classes were provided not via online but via EBS TV programs and learning packets. For students from multicultural families, interpretation and translation support and guidebooks in foreign languages were provided. For students with disabilities, a special online education platform was put in place to provide customized online classes in addition to home-visit classes, learning packets, and educational materials and tools.
- **(Emergency childcare service)** The government provided support to ensure that the children of working parents and children that need to be put in emergency childcare receive both childcare services and online classes.

2. Efforts to Reopen Schools

(1) Decision to Allow School Reopening

- **(Deciding on the method and timeline of school reopening)** The safety and health of students was a top priority and the opinions of Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) officials and health experts were reflected as much as possible when the government was deciding when and how to reopen schools. Before making the final decision, the government sought the opinions of teachers, teachers' groups, education offices, and parents and carefully reviewed multiple return-to-school options.
- **(Staggered timeline for physical attendance)** In particular, 3rd graders in high school were allowed to return to school first as attending school is critical as they prepare for higher education. The return-to-school for preschoolers and 1st and 2nd graders of elementary school was decided after considering the fact that they have difficulty taking online classes and the gap among children in access to online education depending on parents' support as well as the burden of childcare on families.

[Outline of 2020 School Reopening]

Phase	Timeline (plan)	Target		
		High	Middle	Elementary
Priority	May 20 (Wed.)	3 rd	-	-
Phase 1	May 27 (Wed.)	2 nd	3 rd	1 st & 2 nd + preschoolers
Phase 2	June 3 (Wed.)	1 st	2 nd	3 rd & 4 th
Phase 3	June 8 (Mon.)	-	1 st	5 th & 6 th

※ The same applies to special schools.

(2) Preparation for School Reopening

- **(School reopening methods)** As the virus infection trend and the population size of school-aged children vary for each region and/or school, the Ministry of Education decided to allow autonomy to local governments and schools when deciding the specifics of managing staggered school start times by grade/class, operating online and offline classes in parallel, splitting each class into morning and afternoon groups, and implementing flexible school hours.
- **(Disinfection before school reopening)** In preparation for school reopening, the Ministry of Education issued IPC guidelines for schools and students to follow before coming to school, after school, and during school meals. The ministry also provided guidelines on how to deal with suspicious or confirmed cases to minimize confusion at schools in emergency situations. In accordance with the guidelines, schools carried out measures to thoroughly prepare for reopening by securing disease prevention supplies such as face masks and hand sanitizers and sanitizing surfaces that are frequently touched such as door knobs

(3) School disinfection

- **(Disinfection after school reopening)** After school reopening, schools were advised to ventilate classrooms, have staggered break times, and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched frequently such as desks and door knobs. Also, all students and teachers were required to wear face masks at all times and check their body temperature.
- **(Occurrence of confirmed case)** If a confirmed case occurs, the school needs to request all students, teachers, and staff members to go into self-quarantine, replace all classes with online classes, and carry out measures to identify suspected cases in cooperation with health authorities.
- **(Temperature check)** Upon arrival at school, students are tested for fever at the school playground or at the building entrance, and those with suspicious symptoms are sent to a special observation room before being sent to a screening station to receive treatment or, if necessary, a diagnostic test.

(4) Support for School Reopening

- **(On-site support)** The Ministry of Education published guidelines to ease the additional workload on school staff caused by increased disinfection and administrative work and to minimize confusion surrounding school reopening. To ensure smooth operation of in-person school classes, the ministry created the Central Response Team for School Reopening for a swift, around-the-clock response to emergency situations at schools. The ministry also minimized or postponed its projects to avoid creating extra burden on school teachers and staff and secured 30,000 people as support staff for disinfection activities and for operating split classes.
- **(Emergency response)** As a preemptive action to prevent unexpected developments and mass infections in local communities after 3rd graders in high school return to school on May 20, the education authorities announced measures for minimizing density at schools on May 24 and enhanced measures for the Seoul metropolitan area on May 29. As there was a great risk of mass transmission in the Seoul metropolitan area, only two-thirds of students were allowed to come to school for high schools and one-third for kindergartens and elementary and middle schools.