Preamble

Founded in 2008, Dignitas is a leading education organization whose mission is to equip and empower educators who will transform opportunities for the next generation. Dignitas partners with schools to strengthen leadership and improve instructional quality, in order to create an environment where all children can fulfil their potential. To date, Dignitas has partnered with 300 schools, 1500 educators, and impacted the learning of 87,000 children. (Dignitas currently partners with schools in Nairobi, Homa Bay, Machakos, Nyandarua, and Laikipia.)

Dignitas seeks to improve learning outcomes by training, coaching, and supporting educators. Teachers supported by Dignitas demonstrate significant improvement in their teaching skills, and develop greater confidence in the classroom. Most importantly, Dignitas’ curriculum has a positive impact on learning. Learners taught by Dignitas-trained teachers show greater ability to learn and retain content over the course of a lesson than those of non Dignitas-trained teachers. They also show greater self-efficacy and confidence in their understanding of that content.

Dignitas’ curriculum, recently validated by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, focuses on instructional leadership, classroom culture and learner engagement and is designed to equip and empower educators. It is crafted from years of experience and proven programme impact. Full grasp and application of the content therein will ensure that teachers create a school environment in which all children are able to reach their potential.

Background and Evidence - The Role of School Leaders and Teachers

Leading During COVID19 School Closures

The work of Dignitas is rooted in our belief in the fundamental role of School Leaders and teachers in the learning and well-being of children. “Effective school leadership improves teaching quality, ensures effective use of resources, supports teachers to solve problems, offers instructional advice, and sets goals that prioritize learning.”1

This stands true; both in the current predicament of school closures, and as a critical consideration for school reopening. School Leaders and teachers must be adequately equipped and supported to ensure children’s learning and well-being during school closures, in preparation for school reopening, and for the duration of the recovery period. There must be a national effort to rally teachers and School Leaders, led by Teachers Service Commission, positively engaging the

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teacher unions, and leveraging civil society support to equip and support School Leaders and teachers.

“The role of teachers is essential to the success of the learning experience, even more so than the physical environment of schools or the technological infrastructure. When the structuring power of time and place that schools provide, dissolves and online learning becomes the dominant mode, the role of teachers does not diminish, quite on the contrary. Through direct instruction or through guidance provided in self-directed learning, in synchronous or asynchronous modes, the teacher remains essential in steering students’ learning.”

A recent survey of more than 200 School Leaders highlighted that 70% of School Leaders believe it is their responsibility to support learner’s well-being, yet 68% recognize this as their biggest challenge during school closures. School Leaders and teachers are keen to act, but need guidance and support to do so.

**Supporting Learners Remotely**

Remote support for learning also presents considerable challenges for School Leaders and teachers. It is in fact a task that most have not been adequately prepared for. A recent report by Usawa Agenda highlighted that access to digital learning is low and inequitable, with as few as 22% of children benefitting. A survey of more than 800 households in Nairobi’s informal settlements highlighted that only 52% of children had been offered any form of correspondence or support from their schools, and not all of this was focused on learning.

Only 5% of School Leaders have been able to maintain contact remotely with 75-100% of their learners, whilst 38% of School Leaders are in touch with less than 25% of their learners.

Recommendations from the Regional Education Learning Initiative highlight School Leaders and teachers as critical frontline workers, who need to be adequately equipped and supported. The recommendations note that these are trusted members of their communities who, with the right support, can be champions of children’s learning and well-being during school closures and beyond. However, “educators must have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to uptake distance teaching, as well as the mentorship and coaching to ensure they are teaching inclusively for all learners.”

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2. Kenya School Leaders’ Response to COVID-19 (Dignitas and Global School Leaders, April 2020)
7. Learner Centred Teaching: Response to COVI-19 in Marginalized Communities (RELI, May 2020)
8. Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies: A Review of Evidence and Best Practice (USAID, April 2020)
Education stakeholders must “Create a mechanism of just in time professional development for teachers ... Create modalities that foster teacher collaboration and professional communities.”

The aforementioned survey of Kenyan School Leaders\textsuperscript{10} established that 94% are willing to share learning and solutions with others. As educators embrace innovation to successfully support child learning and well-being, it will be invaluable to create space for them to share this learning with each other, and collaborate on iterative solutions to persistent challenges.

**The Need for Equity**

As consideration is given to next steps, care should be taken to ensure inclusion of children typically left behind, including children in ASAL communities and urban informal settlements.

“School closures should not further exacerbate educational inequalities on the basis of gender, poverty, disability, ethnicity, religion, geographic location and more. COVID-19 policies and interventions should be equitable and address the different needs and risks faced by these vulnerable children and youth.”\textsuperscript{11} Distance learning that is reliant on electricity, connectivity and devices will automatically exclude many. KNBS 2019 census data\textsuperscript{12} demonstrates that just 3% of Kenya’s rural population have access to a laptop or tablet, and only 7% have access to internet.

Further, households in marginalized communities are often the households where parents and caregivers have limited literacy themselves, hindering their ability to support learning at home. Usawa Agenda reported that school heads claimed this to be one of the biggest challenges for distance learning\textsuperscript{13} and the Dignitas household survey found that in Nairobi’s informal settlements, 35% of parents have secondary school as the highest level of education, 21% have primary school as the highest level of education, and only 17% have experienced any form of tertiary education\textsuperscript{14}. Further, parents themselves in these communities have stated barriers to supporting learning at home such as ‘know-how’ (39%), time (14%), and access to learning resources (725).\textsuperscript{15}

“As distance learning can often amplify educational divides (Harris 2020; OECD 2015; Picton and Clark 2015), planning for equity at every step of the way is critical.”\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020 (HGSE, OECD 2020)
\item Kenya School Leaders’ Response to COVID-19 (Dignitas and Global School Leaders, April 2020)
\item Learning Must Go On: Recommendations for Keeping Children Safe and Learning, During and After the COVID-19 Crisis (Save the Children, UNICEF, INEE, Plan International, Humanity and Inclusion, Finn Church Aid, April 2020)
\item Learner Centred Teaching: Response to COVID-19 in Marginalized Communities (RELI, May 2020)
\item The State of Online Learning Among School-Going Children During COVID-19 in Kenya (Usawa Agenda, May 2020)
\item Leaders of Learning: Household Mapping Survey (Dignitas, May 2020)
\item Leaders of Learning: Household Mapping Survey (Dignitas, May 2020)
\item Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies: A Review of Evidence and Best Practice (USAID, April 2020)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
One way to overcome these barriers is to differentiate support for households in accordance with the resource and parental support available. For this to happen, household data must be available to inform tailoring of any learning and well-being intervention, and educators must be equipped to appropriately interpret that data and design a suitable response. “One of these important and notable strategies is a multiple-modality approach, which reaches learners and educators across different contexts and demographics. If resources are allocated, design coordinated, equity factors considered and efforts evaluated effectively, distance learning has great potential for extending and enhancing education.”

**Recommendations**

In light of the background and evidence shared above, Dignitas would like to make the following recommendations. It should be noted that Dignitas is willing to partner with the National COVID-19 Education Response Committee and other key agencies to see the fulfillment of these recommendations.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A. Equip School Leaders and Teachers with the tools necessary to support distance learning for all learners.</th>
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<td>B. Offer guidelines, tools and resources to School Leaders and Teachers for:</td>
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<td>1. Periods of School Closure</td>
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<td>2. On-boarding Children for School Re-opening</td>
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<td>C. Roll out remote professional development for School Leaders and teachers that responds to the needs of the current crisis, and is designed to help educators develop critical mindsets, competencies, and skills.</td>
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<td>D. Roll out remote coaching and mentorship for School Leaders and teachers to bolster their own well-being, and to support implementation of new skills and techniques.</td>
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<td>E. For the sake of equity, let consideration and provision for public schools include APBET institutions in marginalized communities.</td>
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<td>F. Consider similar support for pre-service teachers</td>
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Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies: A Review of Evidence and Best Practice (USAID, April 2020)

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These recommendations are clarified further below.

A. Equip School Leaders and Teachers with the tools necessary to support distance learning for all learners.

Usawa Agenda note that some of the most common challenges faced by School Heads in their efforts to support learning are electricity, connectivity, and devices. School leaders and teachers need devices, electricity, and connectivity to receive their own training and support, as well as to source and disseminate learning resources for children at home. Suitable devices will also enable smooth communication and coordination amongst government education officials, school heads and teachers. Finally, devices will support peer to peer learning, sharing and collaboration. “Ensure that school leaders get the financial, logistical and moral support they need to succeed.”

B. Offer guidelines, tools and resources to School Leaders and Teachers for:

1. Periods of School Closure
2. On-boarding Children for School Re-opening
3. School Recovery

There is need for a national framework that supports planning at an institutional level, and is designed to inform the decision making processes of school management boards and head teachers. With limited time, capacity and resource to plan for school reopening and school recovery, simple checklists that consider public health, learning and well-being will facilitate a strategic, coherent and comprehensive national response. “Each school should develop a plan for continuity of operations. As a way to support them, education authorities can provide curated examples of plans in other schools.”

As part of this planning and support, the roles of various actors and educators should be defined, and supported so that this is comprehensive delivery of support across the system that includes all learners. “Clearly define roles and expectations for teachers to effectively steer and support students’ learning in the new situation, through direct instruction where possible or guidance for self-directed learning.”

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18 The State of Online Learning Among School-Going Children During COVID-19 in Kenya (Usawa Agenda, May 2020)
19 A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020 (HGSE, OECD 2020)
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Critical consideration needs to be given to school re-opening, and how best to re-engage learners after a prolonged period at home. Of course these efforts will be bolstered by adequate support from educators for learners during the period of school closures.

Finally, it is expected that alongside regular curriculum delivery, there will be two critical inputs required for learners on return to school. First, accelerated learning programs that are designed to help children regain learning losses, and ‘catch up’ in basic literacy ad numeracy; foundational skills for other areas of learning. Secondly, it is widely acknowledged that children will need additional psychosocial support both during the re-opening and recovery periods. Children have suffered trauma and anxiety to varying extents during this period at home and a failure to address this will lead to longer term stunting of learning and development. “Equip teachers to deal with both learning recovery and students’ mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) needs. Training efforts should explicitly improve teachers’ ability to meet students’ basic literacy/numeracy and social-emotional needs, particularly in schools with a high proportion of at-risk students. Teachers should be trained to identify age-related behavioral and cognitive changes and provide age-appropriate learning support”\(^{22}\)

C. Roll out remote professional development for School Leaders and teachers that responds to the needs of the current crisis, and is designed to help educators develop critical mindsets, competencies, and skills.

Given the current circumstances, the only option is to employ distance learning for in-service teachers to help them develop the skills, competencies and mindsets to support children’s learning and well-being during school closures, school reopening and school recovery. “Distance learning was found to be effective in supporting in-service teachers with subject content, pedagogical content, and understanding of how students learn (Masoud 2020).”\(^{23}\)

D. Roll out remote coaching and mentorship for School Leaders and teachers to bolster their own well-being, and to support implementation of new skills and techniques.

Coaching and mentorship is increasingly acknowledged as a critical lever to support the development and well-being of educators. “Implement innovative teacher support methods, such as online professional development, coaching, or use of tutors to help bring capacity development efforts to scale more rapidly. This training and skills building can also be integrated into formal pre- and in-service teacher trainings.”\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) Framework for Reopening Schools (UNESCO, April 2020)
\(^{23}\) Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies: A Review of Evidence and Best Practice (USAID, April 2020)
\(^{24}\) Framework for Reopening Schools (UNESCO, April 2020)

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E. For the sake of equity, let consideration and provision for public schools include APBET institutions in marginalized communities.

Unlike private schools that target fee-paying middle class learners, there are a significant number of APBET providers in marginalized communities and urban informal settlements who have little financial stability yet provide for significant numbers of learners. Provision for these institutions should be considered, as well as a longer term strategy to improve this portion of the sector, to ensure no child is left behind, or excluded from the education provision they deserve.

Further, educators from APBET institutions should be included in professional development and coaching provision to ensure they too have the mindsets, competencies and skills to support the Government of Kenya during school closures, school reopening and school recovery.

F. Consider similar support for pre-service teachers

Considering the pre-existing teacher shortage, the impending changes to teacher qualifications, and the pause on teacher training that was enforced to allow adjustment to the new Teacher Education framework, there is increasing concern over long term teacher shortages. Education actors, in conjunction with the necessary assessment and qualification bodies should consider means by which to ensure ongoing development of pre-service teachers. “During long closures of education institutions, tutoring and coaching of preservice teachers is also important so that learners can keep up with educational studies to prevent teacher shortages post-crisis. As with younger learners, one-on-one or small group coaching can come through the form of phone, text, and virtual conferencing.”

In conclusion, as the committee considers next steps, the education workforce must be front and central, not only as a point of investment and development, but as a key delivery mechanism for the successful recovery of our nation post COVID-19. “As teachers play a critical role in shaping the future of their students, their role should not be an afterthought but should be an integral part of the preparedness and planning phases for education in emergencies.”

25 Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies: A Review of Evidence and Best Practice (USAID, April 2020)
26 Where It’s Needed Most: Quality Professional Development for All Teachers (INEE, 2015)
Appendix 1: Dignitas’ Response to COVID-19 School Closures

School Leaders and Teachers: Community Champions of Well-Being and Learning

School Leaders and Teachers are pillars of our communities, not just leading schools, but community leaders in their own right. Dignitas is working to equip, empower and support School Leaders and Teachers as new Community Champions for this current global crisis.

Dignitas is renowned for its innovative model of training and coaching that equips educators and schools in marginalized communities to transform student opportunities, and ensure every child can thrive and succeed. During COVID19 school closures, Dignitas has pivoted to design digital training and coaching tools designed for low-tech environments.

Dignitas’ current (remote) professional development and coaching delivery flows as follows:

- Bulk SMS from Dignitas to enrolled Community Champions: share links & reminder of weekly schedule, training & expectations
- Community Champions access mini training module, including toolkit via Messenger ChatBot
- Community Champions access live coach support via Messenger ChatBot
- Reflection & Evaluation data sent to coaches, in preparation for coaching
- Coach follows up with individual coaching phonecalls that directly support implementation of child learning & well-being support
- Coach sets weekly expectations, reviews household Learning Packs
- Optional Webinar to build on content delivery, modelling & practice.
- Community Champions informed of WhatsApp 'Community of Practice' session. (Peer learning, sharing & collaboration led by coach)

May 2020: Dignitas is supporting:
- 300 School Leaders and Teachers
- 30 Trainer of Trainers
- 5,920 Households
Participants report 42% knowledge gain

Expected Outcomes:
1. Children have access to quality care that ensures child safety and well-being
2. Children stay engaged in learning whilst at home
3. Parents are empowered and equipped to support learning at home
4. Community Champions are equipped to support households and ensure the well-being and safety of children

Training Topics:
Who is a Leader of Learning? Dealing with Trauma & Anxiety
Monitoring Child Well-Being, Parental Engagement
Leveraging Resources for Distance Learning (Part One and Two)
Growth Mindset during COVID19
Taking Care of Yourself – Healthy Leader, Healthy Learners
Recovery & Building Back (School Reopening, Psycho-social Support, Accelerated Learning)

Let’s keep all children safe and learning!

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