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FIRST RESULTS OF LARGE-SCALE SCHOOL STUDY

SCHOOLS ARE ON A GOOD TRACK AMIDST THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

In the study “Continuity and Change of Schools in Times of Crisis” (Kontinuität und Wandel der Schule in Krisenzeiten – KWiK), school principals were asked how they are mastering the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Initial results from the study paint a positive picture but reveal the need for some catching up as well.

In March 2020, regular school operations were suspended in all German federal states as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The closing of schools and the associated switch from classroom instruction to learning from home—as well as the return to school operations after several weeks—put pressure on schools in many ways. Another school shutdown in November 2020 posed further challenges for the schools. They have had to, and are still having to, find feasible solutions to mastering these extraordinary situations.

As the first part of the study “Continuity and Change of Schools in Times of Crisis” (KWiK)—in which Universität Hamburg, the Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education at the University of Kiel (IPN), and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) are taking part—some 800 principals of primary and secondary schools were asked in the summer and early fall of 2020 about teaching during the coronavirus pandemic, and their experiences and solution approaches in school practice.



The key findings:

Communication was successfully maintained during lockdown, schools were able to reach their pupils

According to those surveyed, communication during the school shutdown in spring 2020 functioned mostly smoothly—both between colleagues and with the parents and the pupils. Nearly 40% of the principals indicate that all pupils were reached. Nearly half of those surveyed indicate that 90% were reached. Only 3.6% of principals report that it was possible to reach less than 80% of pupils.

In providing lesson materials, primary schools concentrated mostly on the core subjects, while secondary level I schools attempted to cover as many subjects as possible. The primary schools chose mostly physical paths (pickup or delivery of the materials, shipment by post) for transfer of the learning materials, while the secondary level I schools tended to opt for digital channels such as data exchange portals or email.

Prof. Dr. Ingrid Gogolin, educational scientist and study spokesperson at Universität Hamburg, says: “The schools found a large variety of technical and methodological solutions to master the challenges of remote learning. It is notable, however, that relatively little use was made of dialog-based and cooperative formats as compared to their implementation in classroom learning. Frontal teaching style underwent a renaissance, due in good part to the lack of other options.”

Digital equipment in families: disadvantaged pupils require support

Although the answers from the school principals create a general sense of optimism, they indicate some problem areas as well. Approximately half of those surveyed, for example, state that the majority of the parents are able to support their children in learning at home on digital devices. On the other hand, however, nearly two-thirds indicate that they have the impression up to 20% of the pupils do not have the necessary digital equipment at home for distance learning. According to the principals, this is especially true of pupils from families that are already disadvantaged. Prof. Dr. Ingrid Gogolin: “In this study, we are paying special attention to diversity in the student body. From this point of view, we can see that children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged families, families with a migration background, and families with special education support needs appear to have been less successfully reached. These pupils require significantly more support, starting simply with the digital end devices and continuing from there.”



After the first lockdown, schools compensated for learning losses with additional education offers

During the interim re-opening in last summer and fall, many schools provided additional offers for students as a means of compensating for the losses suffered during lockdown. The additional learning offers from primary schools were directed in large part to disadvantaged children. Secondary level I schools focused on learning offers to improve pupils' IT knowledge.

After the lockdown was before the lockdown: schools felt well prepared

Nearly all of the principals surveyed (97%) indicate that, after the first pandemic-induced lockdown, they took steps to prepare themselves for another one. Of those surveyed, 94% (secondary level I) and 84% (primary level) answered that they are preparing for additional remote learning phases. According to principal Olaf Köller, "These findings make us optimistic that the schools will also do a good job getting through the difficult phases ahead in spring and summer 2021."

KWiK study

The KWiK study is a collaborative project between Universität Hamburg (Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Ingrid Gogolin), the IPN—Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education (Prof. Dr. Olaf Köller), and the IEA—International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Dr. Dirk Hastedt). In order to support the schools taking part in the study in their developmental work, a report with initial scientific findings from the study will be sent to them this week. In the next step, the open questions in the survey sent to the principals will be evaluated. The study will also be expanded to teachers and possibly to pupils and their parents as well.

The first results of the KWiK school administration survey in summer / early fall 2020 are available [online \(PDF\)](#).

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