

# EDUCATION

## Updates

28 March 2020

### ASIA & PACIFIC

**Singapore, March 23: Exam-style seating, wipe-down routines - Schools reopen with safe distancing measures to prevent coronavirus spread [The Straits Times].** Most students across Singapore returned to school on Monday (March 23), the first day after the week-long March holidays. Some are serving a 14-day leave of absence after returning from trips abroad during the holidays, as part of stricter measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus announced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) last week. The leave of absence would apply to students and staff of schools, pre-schools and student care centres who returned from overseas on or after March 14, MOE had said. Students who have to miss classes will be supported through home-based learning programmes. [\[LINK\]](#)

**Singapore, March 25: Coronavirus: NUS, NTU and SMU let students write off grades for modules this semester [The Straits Times].** The National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Singapore Management University (SMU) are letting students write off their grades for modules this semester, to ease anxieties about disruptions to learning amid the coronavirus outbreak. NUS is allowing undergraduates to exercise the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) option for up to 10 modular credits for any module taken this semester. This translates to about two typical modules, and excludes final-year projects, honours theses and equivalent modules. The S/U option allows a student to take a course and attain the modular credits for graduation, without receiving a letter grade. NTU and SMU will also let undergraduates use the S/U option, but for all courses this semester. [\[LINK\]](#)

**Singapore, March 27: Parents grapple with quarantine orders, closures [The Straits Times].** Children - and some of their parents - at a PAP Community Foundation (PCF) Sparkletots centre at Fengshan Block 126, which has been identified as a Covid-19 cluster, have been served with quarantine orders. Other parents are scrambling to make alternative care arrangements for their pre-school children as all

360 PCF Sparkletots centres, with more than 40,000 children enrolled islandwide, are being closed for four days, starting yesterday. The centre closures come after the Fengshan Block 126 branch emerged on Wednesday as a new coronavirus cluster. There are now 20 cases linked to the cluster - 15 are staff, and five are family members of the school's principal, who is a confirmed case. The centre's remaining 10 staff and about 110 pupils are in quarantine. Another 30 staff from other PCF centres have also been placed under quarantine as they had attended a training course with the Fengshan PCF centre's principal. News of the other 30 staff across other PCF centres being quarantined spooked some parents. [\[LINK\]](#)

**Malaysia, March 26: Making the switch to online learning [New Straits Times].** Alternative teaching and learning methods are being put in place by universities to ensure continuity in academic activities should there be a prolonged interruption to the current semester due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For institutions that have adopted the blended learning approach, a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media alongside traditional face-to-face teaching, this means fine-tuning and extending the electronic and online elements more extensively and at a bigger scale. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), for example, had all courses accessible online on its learning management system, e-Learn@USM, to complement the face-to-face class. USM Centre for Development of Academic Excellence director Professor Abd Karim Alias said students could access learning resources, such as PowerPoint presentation, notes and recorded videos. To substitute face-to-face classes, a video conferencing application, Webex, is used to conduct live online sessions. "Student engagement is the challenging part of online learning. We encourage lecturers to create interactive learning activities using applications to enhance and promote student engagement," he said. [\[LINK\]](#)

## ASIA & PACIFIC [CONT'D]

**Malaysia, March 26: Malaysian team bags gold, silver at German culinary competition [New Straits Times].** Armed with pots and pans, the Malaysia National Youth Culinary Team took home a gold medal for the "Restaurant of the Nations" category at the 25th IKA/Culinary Olympics in Stuttgart, Germany. Held from February 14 to 19, the event saw the participation of more than 2,000 chefs from more than 60 nations. The team, which comprised of students from Sunway University School of Hospitality and Kolej Yayasan Pahang also won a silver medal for the "IKA Buffet" category. [\[LINK\]](#)

**Indonesia, March 23: Are school closures, work-from-home policies cost-effective for pandemic? [The Jakarta Post].** As Southeast Asia's most populous country, Indonesia has reported the highest increase in the number of infections and deaths from COVID-19, mostly in the capital. The Jakarta administration decided to close all schools in the region starting March 16. At the repeated urging by the President and regional leaders, several institutions, workplaces and companies have implemented remote working. These policies will be reviewed by end of March. However, the stakeholders will find it difficult to make a comprehensive review of these policies as the impact of such closures remains unclear. In general, long periods of closures can result in the greatest reductions in terms of peak and cumulative rates of infection. The optimum timing of school closure will depend on its duration, although very late closures are consistently found to be relatively ineffective. [\[LINK\]](#)

**Australia, March 26: 'More harm than good' - the case for and against closing schools during the coronavirus pandemic [The Guardian].** Closing schools at this point in time will likely do more harm than good and potentially lead to more deaths and use of hospital beds from Covid-19 infections. There is a lot we still don't know about Covid-19. What we do know is that children appear to very rarely have serious disease and complications, compared to those in the older age groups – especially their grandparents. The data from a range of countries shows that children rarely, and in many countries never, have died from this infection. Children appear to get infected at a much lower rate than those who are older, although confirmation of that will need to await the rollout of large-scale antibody testing,

which tells you that you have had an infection in the past. The most important interventions are quarantining those with infections and those having a much higher risk and those over 70 years old having maximal social distancing. [\[LINK\]](#)

## AMERICAS

**USA, March 27: Stimulus Not Nearly Enough to Save Schools [US News].** Public schools, colleges and universities got \$31 billion in relief – an amount advocates say is insufficient. Public school and higher education systems netted nearly \$31 billion combined in the \$2 trillion stimulus the House passed Friday to combat the economic repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic – an amount stakeholders say is hardly sufficient to bolster the financial crises they face. The \$30.8 billion education stabilization fund will send \$14.3 billion to institutions of higher education, far below the \$50 billion college and university officials estimated they'd need to survive the financial hit they're taking after the majority closed their campuses after spring break and pivoted to distance learning. [\[LINK\]](#)

## EUROPE

**UK, March 27: Children could face more mental health problems amid lengthy school closures experts warn [Independent].** Vulnerable young people could be at greater risk of mental health problems amid lengthy school closures during the coronavirus pandemic, experts have warned. Children and teenagers across the country have had to cope with schools suddenly closing their doors, the cancellation of exams and a prohibition of face-to-face interactions with friends. A lack of structure and routine is already taking its toll on young people's mental health – and psychotherapists say it could get worse as lockdown measures continue. The warnings come as Childline revealed that it has seen a "huge spike" in the number of counselling sessions relating to coronavirus in the last seven days. Nearly two-thirds of the counselling sessions with children worried about the pandemic took place when school closures were announced last week and parents began working from home. [\[LINK\]](#)