

Opinion letter

Reopening of Schools in Bulgaria during COVID-19 Pandemic: 2021 Edition

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*"We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teacher, leave them kids alone
Hey! Teacher! Leave them kids alone!"*

Do you remember this song by the legendary band "Pink Floyd"? In the 1970s and 1980s, it could be heard everywhere. And not only. It was seen as a rebellious anthem against being turned into "just another brick in the wall."

Today, the children who in the past expressed their disagreement with the school system to the sounds of this rock song are now parents, and somehow there is no memory of the words of "Pink Floyd." And there is the opposite: outrage against the online training imposed as a measure against the spread of COVID-19, demands a return to a face-to-face form of studying.¹ It's as if schooling is a panacea, or maybe it's just a transfer of responsibility - to teach the child discipline and to learn from someone else because the process is not only essential but also tricky. However, the problem is that when the process in the school meets the teenager's resistance, the parents take the side of the adolescent, and the school turns out to be wrong again.

And against the background of this seemingly vicious circle, the real reason for students' return to the present form of education in the still-developing pandemic of COVID-19 in Bulgaria is a bit confusing. But let's look at how the students will return:

"From Thursday, February 4, in addition to the primary school students, the 7th, 8th and 12th grades will return to class for two weeks by order of the Minister of Health. The others continue distance learning.

From February 18 to March 2, there will be face-to-face studying for the 5th, 10th and 11th grades and the initial classes. During this time,

the remaining high school and junior high school classes - 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 12th grade, will be on distance learning.

From March 4 to March 17, the school will be attended by primary school students and students in 6th, 9th and 12th grade. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, the other students will study at a distance in an electronic environment.

The state's plan is to alternate classes in order not to confuse many students. Maybe better than nothing. But is it enough? But even in areas where population infections were on the increase, school outbreaks were rare, particularly where steps were taken to minimize transmission. More than 65.000 schools in Italy were re-opened in September, when the number of cases in the population had risen. But only 1,212 campuses witnessed outbreaks four weeks back.²

Many parents and teachers worry about the facts gathered from research that children could be more contagious. And returning them to school with a proven UK variant of SARS-CoV-2 (B.1.1.7) in Bulgaria will unleash a new wave, at a time when, under different circumstances, we are coping with the situation.³ And if this happens, it will be necessary to close everything again, and the economy will suffer again. For at least a third time of closure and it is expected to be disastrous.

Therefore, just preventing students from mixing is not a long-term and sufficient solution. Everyone must understand the situation - parents, children, teachers. Furthermore, all safety measures must be observed - wearing a mask, less contact with children outside the classroom, high level of hygiene and distance, testing, and vaccination of teachers. Everyone should be aware of their responsibility and not underestimate the situation. Something a little tricky in Bulgaria, but still - not impossible.

References

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