

# Official COVID-19 coping strategies in educational institutions

*Estratégias de enfrentamento oficiais da COVID-19 em instituições de ensino*  
*Estrategias de enfrentamiento oficiales de la COVID-19 en instituciones de enseñanza*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To analyze normative acts on coping with COVID-19 in the teaching environment, sanctioned by the state and federal governments of Brazil. **Methods:** Documentary research, with a qualitative approach to documents published by federal and state education and health bodies between March/2020 and March/2021, analyzed according to Bardin's Document Analysis framework. **Results:** From 61 documents, four categories resulted: Acts and strategies to protect against COVID-19 adopted by the federal government; Normative acts of state governments on suspension of classes; Strategies to protect against COVID-19 in the teaching environment common among Brazilian states; Strategies to protect against COVID-19 in the teaching environment specific to Brazilian states. **Final considerations:** The normative acts analyzed present weaknesses regarding the clarification on how to establish the systematization of COVID-19 surveillance actions in the teaching environment, as well as there is a lack of reflections on the importance of such actions.

**Descriptors:** Epidemiological Monitoring; COVID-19; Government Publication; Schools; Coping Skills.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Analisar atos normativos sobre enfrentamento da COVID-19 no ambiente de ensino, sancionados pelos governos estaduais e federal do Brasil. **Métodos:** Pesquisa documental, com abordagem qualitativa de documentos publicados por órgãos federais e estaduais da educação e da saúde entre março/2020 e março/2021, analisados de acordo com o referencial de Bardin de Análise Documental. **Resultados:** De 61 documentos, resultaram quatro categorias: Atos e estratégias de proteção contra a COVID-19 adotadas pelo governo federal; Atos normativos de governos estaduais sobre suspensão de aulas; Estratégias de proteção contra a COVID-19 no ambiente de ensino comuns entre estados brasileiros; Estratégias de proteção contra a COVID-19 no ambiente de ensino específicas de estados brasileiros. **Considerações finais:** Os atos normativos analisados apresentam fragilidades quanto ao esclarecimento sobre como estabelecer a sistematização das ações de vigilância da COVID-19 no ambiente de ensino, bem como há escassez de reflexões acerca da importância de tais ações.

**Descritores:** Vigilância Epidemiológica; COVID-19; Documento Oficial; Instituições de Ensino; Estratégias de Enfrentamento.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Analizar actos normativos sobre enfrentamiento de la COVID-19 en instituciones académicas, sancionados por los gobiernos estatales y federal de Brasil. **Métodos:** Investigación documental, con abordaje cualitativo de documentos publicados por órganos federales y estatales de la educación y de la salud entre marzo/2020 y marzo/2021, analizados conforme el referencial de Bardin de Análisis Documental. **Resultados:** De 61 documentos, resultaron cuatro categorías: Actos y estrategias de protección contra la COVID-19 adoptadas por el gobierno federal; Actos normativos de gobiernos estatales sobre suspensión de clases; Estrategias de protección contra la COVID-19 en instituciones académicas comunes entre estados brasileños; Estrategias de protección contra la COVID-19 en instituciones académicas específicas de estados brasileños. **Consideraciones finales:** Los actos normativos analizados presentan fragilidades cuanto al esclarecimiento sobre como establecer la sistematización de las acciones de vigilancia de la COVID-19 en instituciones académicas, así como hay escasez de reflexiones acerca de la importancia de tales acciones.

**Descriptorios:** Monitoreo Epidemiológico; COVID-19; Publicación Gubernamental; Instituciones Académicas; Estrategias de Enfrentamiento.

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, an infectious disease caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has modified the work and teaching process in the global context, thus generating substantial changes in the way of enabling access to education, since the main measures to prevent and control the disease are isolation and social distancing<sup>(1-2)</sup>.

In-person teaching activities were interrupted for 91% of students worldwide during the pandemic period<sup>(3)</sup>. In Brazil, with the extension of the public calamity situation, educational institutions, from basic to higher education, were forced to adapt their pedagogical strategies to continue classes through Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). In this teaching model, face-to-face classes are suspended, and materials are made available via an online platform. It is worth mentioning that ERE differs from Distance Learning (DL), since the latter seeks maximum proximity and use of teaching-learning methods that follow the principles and characteristics of face-to-face teaching<sup>(4-5)</sup>.

Countries such as France, the United States and China have prepared guides for the safe reopening of educational establishments, in addition to a specific guide for school managers and guidance on how to react in cases of students and professionals with symptoms of COVID-19<sup>(6)</sup>.

Closer to the Brazilian reality, in South America, Chile also presented a "Protocol on sanitary measures for educational establishments" focused on the safe reopening of teaching environments, based on the updated situation in the country and with systematized measures to resume face-to-face classes<sup>(7)</sup>.

In Brazil, there is no such standardization, which places the country among the worst government measures to face the pandemic<sup>(8-9)</sup>. It is assumed that the preparation of managers of educational institutions through protocols and official documents allows them to be trained to deal with possible outbreaks and prevent cases, in addition to making them multipliers of information both in their teaching and in the community in which they are inserted<sup>(10)</sup>.

That said, this research seeks to answer the following question: What were the strategies provided for in normative acts sanctioned in Brazil to face the COVID 19 pandemic in the teaching environment?

## OBJECTIVE

To analyze the normative acts sanctioned by States and Municipalities to face the COVID-19 pandemic in the teaching environment.

## METHODS

### Ethical aspects

In accordance with Resolution No. 510, of April 7, 2016, all ethical precepts were observed. As this is document analysis research with information in the public domain, it was not necessary to submit it to the Research Ethics Committee.

## Theoretical-methodological framework

The study was carried out according to the document analysis framework proposed by Bardin (2011), called Thematic Content Analysis, which is divided into three stages: Pre-analysis; Exploration of the material; and Treatment of results<sup>(11)</sup>.

### Study type

Study with a qualitative approach, of an exploratory and descriptive nature, in which a documentary analysis of normative acts of the federal and state governments of Brazil, published during the declared period of the COVID-19 pandemic, with content aimed at coping with COVID-19, was carried out in teaching environments. The guide used for the structure of this study was the Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ).

### Data collection and organization

It took place during the months of April and May 2021, on portals of national health and education agencies, as well as in the 26 Brazilian states and the Federal District. The keywords used on these sites were "Suspension of classes"; "Protocol for returning to face-to-face classes"; "Decree to return to face-to-face classes"; "Return to face-to-face classes"; and "COVID 19".

The general criterion for the inclusion of documents was: having been published in the period from the promulgation of Ordinance No.

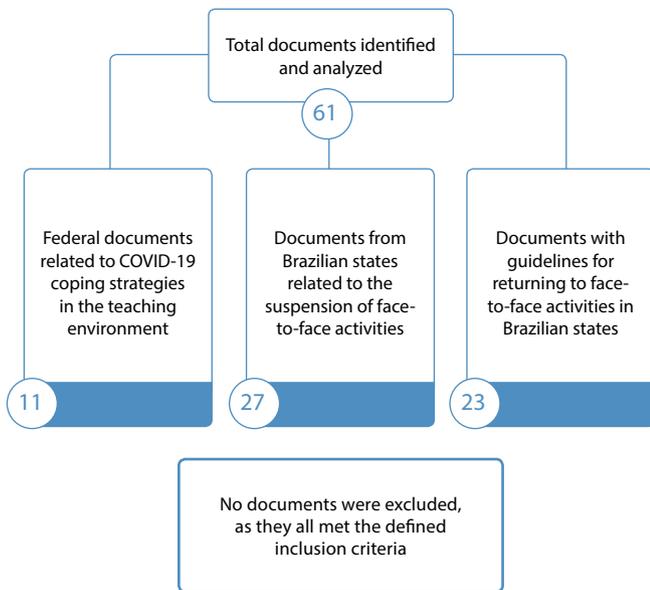
For documents related to the suspension of activities, the following criteria were used: contain in the title and/or description the indication of suspension of face-to-face teaching activities and COVID-19; and be the first document on the subject published after the declaration of the pandemic. As for the documents related to the strategy for returning to activities, the following criteria were considered: containing in the title and/or description the indication of protocol, technical note, guideline, together with "return to face-to-face teaching activities"; and be the most current document of its kind published by the body in question. Due to the above, exclusion criteria do not apply.

### Data analysis

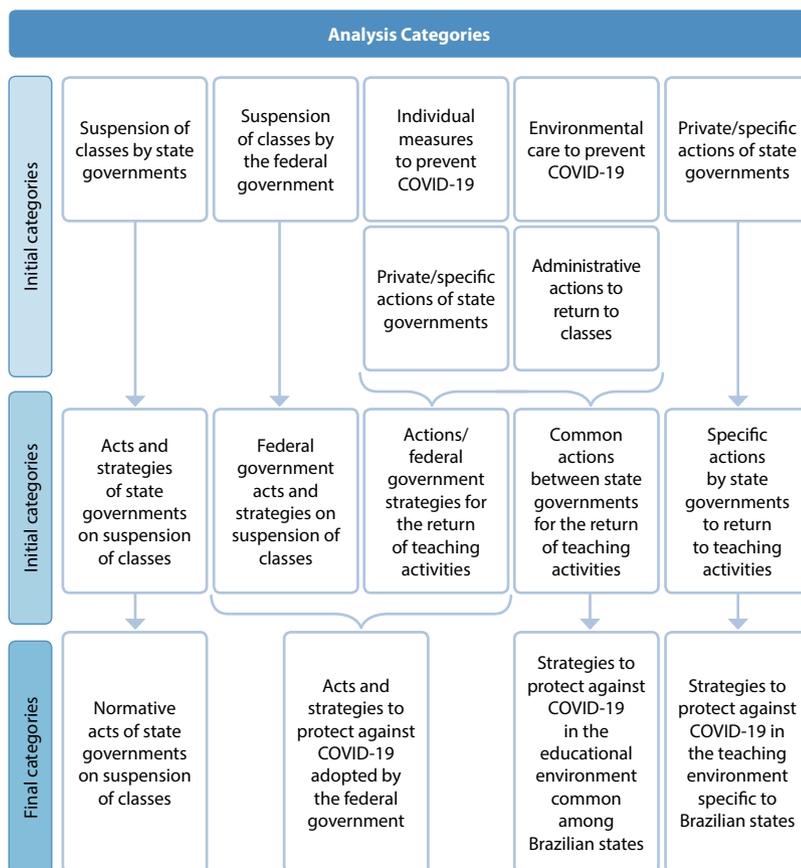
During the pre-analysis of the data, the documents were organized in the Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet generator, according to the date of publication, nature of the content of the documents (strategies of suspension or return to classes), publication organ, location (for Brazilian states) and document title.

The second stage, exploration of the material, comprised the data coding system contained in the documents studied and the definition of the categories of analysis<sup>(11)</sup>.

Based on the registration units, similar and divergent, the initial categories were formulated. By crossing data from the first categorization, five intermediate categories were established. Finally, from the grouping of data from these five, four final categories emerged, as seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 1** – Number of documents analyzed in data collection, Curitiba, state of Paraná, Brazil, 2021



**Figure 2** – Analysis Categories, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, 2021

The third and final stage of the analysis, the treatment of the results, took place through the articulation and discussion between the final categories and the literature on the subject.

### Acts and strategies to protect against COVID-19 adopted by the federal government

Since the publication of Ordinance No. 188/2020<sup>(12)</sup> on the Public Health Emergency situation in Brazil, a series of documents establishing strategies to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the teaching environment have been published by public administration bodies, such as health and education.

In March 2020, the Ministry of Education (MEC) publishes Ordinance No. higher education member of the federal education system. Thus, between May and June 2020, the validity period was extended until December 31, 2020<sup>(14-15)</sup>.

In July 2020, the MEC publishes the Biosafety Protocol for the Return of Activities in Federal Educational Institutions, which comprises the set of actions aimed at preventing, controlling, mitigating, or eliminating risks inherent to activities that may compromise human health, the quality of life and the environment. To operationalize this proposal, the document recommends that educational institutions establish a local commission for the definition and adoption of their own protocols, which consider the local epidemiological characteristics<sup>(16)</sup>.

Five months after the protocol, Ordinance MEC No. 1,030 of December 1, 2020<sup>(17)</sup> was published, addressing the return to face-to-face classes from January 4, 2021, and the continued use of digital educational resources. Six days later, there were changes to the text, resetting the date for the return of activities to March 1, 2021, and establishing the use of digital resources in full for institutions in which local legislation determines the suspension of face-to-face activities<sup>(18)</sup>.

### Normative acts of state governments on suspension of classes

Chart 2 shows the dates on which the decrees suspending face-to-face classes were published by state governments. All Brazilian states published measures in this regard.

### Strategies to protect against COVID-19 in the educational environment common among Brazilian states

Documentos oficiais com estratégias para o retorno das aulas começaram a ser publicados por alguns estados brasileiros a partir do segundo semestre de 2020, incluindo o momento da coleta dos dados.

As for the common strategies of state governments for returning to school, the category included the following scores: Individual measures to prevent COVID-19; Collective measures to prevent COVID-19; Environmental care to prevent COVID-19; and administrative actions to resume activities.

**Chart 1** – Federal documents on strategies related to the prevention of COVID-19, with impacts on the teaching environment, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, 2021

Name	Publication date
Ordinance No. 188 - Provides for the Public Health Emergency situation in Brazilian territory, arising from the COVID-19 pandemic	03/02/2020
Law nº 13,979 - Provides for measures to face the public health emergency, bringing in its text definitions such as isolation and quarantine	06/02/2020
Ordinance No. 356 - Operates Law No. 13,979/2020	11/03/2020
Ordinance No. 343 - Provides for the replacement of face-to-face classes with classes in digital media by a higher education institution of the federal education system	17/03/2020
Decree nº 06 - Recognizes the situation of public calamity in the country	30/03/2020
Provisional Measure nº 934 - Establishes exceptional norms for the academic year of basic and higher education.	01/04/2020
Ordinance No. 473 - Extends the period of validity of the strategies provided for in Ordinance No. 343/2020.	12/05/2020
Ordinance No. 544 - Extends the replacement of face-to-face activities by digital means until December 31, 2020 for institutions of the federal education network.	16/06/2020
Ordinance No. 572 - Establishes the Biosafety Protocol for the Return of Activities in Federal Educational Institutions	01/07/2020
MEC Ordinance No. 1030 - Addresses the return of face-to-face classes and the use of digital educational resources	01/12/2020
MEC Ordinance No. 1030 - Addresses the return of face-to-face classes and the use of digital educational resources	07/12/2020

**Chart 2** – Date of publication of documents on protective measures against COVID 19 in the teaching environment, published by state governments at the beginning of the public health emergency in Brazil, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, 2021

Document Type	States	Publication date
Decree on suspension of face-to-face teaching activities and promotion of social isolation	Distrito Federal	11/03/2020
	Goiás, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo e Tocantins	13/03/2020
	Acre, Amazonas, Bahia, Espírito Santo, Ceará, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, Paraná, Piauí, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondônia, Roraima e Sergipe	16/03/2020
	Alagoas, Amapá, Mato Grosso do Sul, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte e Santa Catarina	17/03/2020
Deliberation on suspension of face-to-face teaching activities	Minas Gerais	22/03/2020

**Chart 3** – Strategies for returning to face-to-face classes in educational institutions, published by health and education agencies in Brazilian states, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, 2021

State	Document Type	Legislation and Strategies	Date
Acre	Decree	Decree No. 7225 - Rules for resuming face-to-face teaching activities	05/11/2020
Alagoas	Ordinance	Ordinance/SEDUC nº 10.559/2020 - Security measures regarding COVID-19 in the school environment	20/10/2020
Amapá	Technical norm	Technical Note No. 002/2020 - Return to school protocol with COVID-19 prevention measures	22/10/2020
Amazonas	Scheme	Return Plan to face-to-face activities - Health actions for post-COVID-19 pandemic education	2020
Ceará	Protocol	Reopening Protocols - Sector 18 - Return of educational activities	29/08/2020
Espírito Santo	Joint Ordinance	Joint Ordinance SESA/SEDU Nº 02-R - Health security measures when returning to face-to-face classes	29/09/2020
Goiás	Protocol	Biosafety Protocol for the Return of On-site Activities in Educational Institutions in the State of Goiás	20/10/2020
Maranhão	Decree	Decree No. 35,897 - Resumption of educational activities in Maranhão	30/06/2020

To be continued

Chart 3 (concluded)

State	Document Type	Legislation and Strategies	Date
Mato Grosso do Sul	Protocol	Back to School Protocol in state schools in Mato Grosso do Sul - Axes and measures to be considered when returning to face-to-face classes	11/2020
Minas Gerais	Protocol	Health protocol for returning to face-to-face school activities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic	02/21
Pará	Scheme	Gradual Class Return Plan - Establishes guidelines for the gradual return of school activities.	2020
Paraíba	Decree	Decree nº 41.010 - Defines and establishes measures to be taken for the return of classes.	07/02/2021
Paraná	Resolution	SESA Resolution nº 98 - Addresses strategies and guidelines for returning to school.	03/02/2021
Pernambuco	Ordinance	SEE Ordinance No. 3024 - Establishes the Sectorial Protocol for the return of Activities in State Educational Institutions.	30/09/2020
Piauí	Decree	Decree No. 19,429 - Approves the Protocol with Measures to Prevent and Control the Spread of SARS-Cov-2 (COVID-19) for the Education sector.	08/01/2021
Rio de Janeiro	Resolution	SEEDUC Resolution No. 5,854 - Guides the teaching network on basic health and pedagogical protocols for returning to school.	30/07/2020
Rio Grande do Norte	Resolution	CEE-RN Resolution No. 04/2020 - Provides for the approval of the "Potiguar Document" - Guidelines for the Resumption of School Activities in Rio Grande do Norte.	21/09/2020
Rio Grande do Sul	Joint Ordinance	Joint Ordinance SES/SEDUC/RS No. 01/2020 - Measures to prevent and control COVID-19 to be adopted by Educational Institutions in the State of Rio Grande do Sul	01/06/2020
Rondônia	Technical Note	Technical Note No. 53/ State Health Surveillance Agency - Prevention actions related to COVID-19 in the school/academic community	15/07/2020
Santa Catarina	Joint Ordinance	Joint Ordinance SES/SED No. 983 - Establishes health safety protocols for the return of school/educational activities.	15/12/2020
São Paulo	Resolution	Resolution SEDUC 11 - Provides for the resumption of face-to-face activities in basic education institutions, in accordance with measures of the São Paulo Plan.	26/01/2021
Sergipe	Ordinance	SES Ordinance No. 273 - Approves health protocol for the return of face-to-face classes.	29/10/2020
Tocantins	Joint Ordinance	Joint Ordinance SES/GASEC/SEDUC/UNITINS Nº 2 - Approves the Health Safety Protocol for the Return of In-person Educational Activities.	21/10/2020

### Strategies to protect against COVID-19 in the teaching environment specific to Brazilian states

Some states address, in the text of their protocols, the operationalization of actions in a more didactic and complete way than others. The state of Santa Catarina, for example, stands out for its detailed guidance in the development of the Action Plan for returning to school.

The protocol established by the state of Mato Grosso do Sul brings, as part of the axes, measures that aim to guide school actors on the relevance and need to establish strategies aimed at mental health issues of students and education professionals, in situations of violence as well as general guidelines.

The monitoring of COVID-19 cases and risk situations, based on the analysis of data collected in the educational institutions themselves, is clearly and structured in only five protocols and state plans. Integration with the local health surveillance service was also not a common content provided for in the documents.

Regarding strategies related to technological resources, the state of São Paulo instituted the Education Information and Monitoring System for COVID-19, a tool that allows the consolidation of data and information regarding the incidence of the disease in the school community.

### DISCUSSION

Based on documents published by state governments, it is possible to observe a movement, between February 11 and 22, 2020, regarding the suspension of classes, coinciding with the publication of the first measures of the federal government on the prevention of COVID 19. This articulation between publications demonstrates the strong influence of guidelines from federal agencies on actions at the state level.

State measures and acts accompany, in addition to federal government determinations, the contamination curve and lethality of the disease. There were numerous attempts to return to classes, however, unsuccessful, due to exponential increases in cases in places where the dynamics of everyday life tried to be maintained and, in some cases, without sufficient preparation for that<sup>(14)</sup>.

The protocols published by state bodies present guidelines in an objective way regarding the axes of individual and collective measures of protection and care for the environment for the prevention of COVID-19. The main challenge for the MEC goes beyond hygiene measures and relates to health surveillance measures and monitoring for the return of face-to-face school activities.

It is worth mentioning the role of the Health Surveillance Secretariat (SVS) of the Ministry of Health (MS) in coordinating health

surveillance actions within the Union. public health to protect the health of the population, it is one of the responsibilities of the SVS to disseminate information and guidelines that consider all the complexity of health situations<sup>(19)</sup>.

As in Brazil, the federal system in the United States allows each state to decide on the period of isolation within its territory, including the closing and opening of schools. Despite this similarity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) adopted three different strategies for schools, which include biosafety protocols for educational institutions, specific guidance guides for school managers and the creation of a FAQ (frequently asked questions) for school administrators, teachers, and parents to access whenever they have questions. A checklist was also made available that can be used by schools when planning and implementing new policies to combat COVID-19<sup>(6-20)</sup>.

Measures by the French Ministry of Solidarity and Health are similar to those proposed by the CDC. The guides prepared for guidance on returning to school activities address hygiene and cleaning measures as well as decision-making in the face of suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the school community<sup>(21)</sup>.

Preparing for the reopening of educational institutions is an intersectoral action. Recommendations should not focus on the definition of schedules, but on planning that both considers local specificities and the epidemiological context and is developed in an integrated manner with the school community<sup>(22)</sup>.

A document produced by the Chilean preschool education sub-secretariat was created with the participation of more than 120 social organizations and sought to focus on safety, stability, and effectiveness of actions, as well as empathy (if there is understanding of situations in each community educational). However, this is not a characteristic of the documentation analyzed in this study, which consists of decrees, technical notes, resolutions and government ordinances without the participation of education and health councils<sup>(7)</sup>.

Predominantly, documents published by state agencies do not include, in their text, content that encourages the reader to reflect on the positive impacts of the measures oriented therein. Given the transmission characteristic of COVID-19, reflexive issues also need to be discussed with workers. Understanding and considering the impact of COVID-19 on education and health is essential to understand why there are protocols to be followed to maintain public biosecurity<sup>(22)</sup>.

A measure commonly foreseen in the analyzed documents and perceived as potential is the elaboration of action plans and specific protocols for the institutions, developed according to the local reality. Planned actions can become more assertive and resolute, if compatible with locoregional characteristics, such as social, cultural, economic, political, structural and population issues<sup>(23)</sup>.

As for the training of the team to implement the plan, not all the documents analyzed point to this need. Some states indicate training through articulation with the health services, while others even make the institution itself responsible for the training of employees. COVID-19 prevention measures involve interdisciplinary knowledge; with this, it is essential to consider that teaching teams may not master these contents, or even have wrong knowledge<sup>(24)</sup>. Adequate training needs to be offered by people who master the subject.

The lack of specific guidelines arising from both the MEC and the MS potentiates divergences between specific strategies in Brazilian states. It is noticed that several actions should be implemented in all federative units, such as guidelines for continuing the monitoring of suspected or confirmed cases away from the institution, in addition to the care with their reintegration after the period of isolation and psychological support for the school community returning to face-to-face activities. Studies claim that the risk of mental health impairment is high due to the new situation of social distancing and isolation, which triggers stress, depression, panic syndrome, among other mental disorders<sup>(25-26)</sup>.

State documents do not usually present working instrument models for the establishment and registration of epidemiological surveillance actions, such as checklists, spreadsheet models or other documents aimed at controlling actions. If there was a centralized action in this aspect, the SVS would be able to standardize the collection of this data for better analysis and decision making.

### Study limitations

The study is limited by the fact that the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic and the specific epidemiological situation of each state influence frequent changes in official documents already published.

### Contributions to the area of Health and Public Policy

This study allows the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses present in documents published by health and education management bodies at the state and federal levels. Therefore, it contributes by promoting reflection on possibilities for improving and strengthening COVID-19 surveillance actions in the teaching environment, since the national scenario related to COVID-19 requires adequate and standardized coping measures.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The contents analyzed in the normative acts demonstrate the importance of such documents as a guideline for the development of effective actions by local, municipal, and state managers, to prevent COVID-19 in the teaching environment.

The strategies provided by state agencies for the surveillance of COVID-19 in educational institutions seek to be supported by the documentation of the Ministries of Health and Education. This reinforces the responsibility of federal agencies for guidelines that are adequate and consider the different realities and complexities existing in the broad Brazilian education system.

State laws can meet the need for individual and collective measures and care for the physical environment, but there are weaknesses related to the systematization of COVID-19 surveillance actions. The documents do not encourage reflection on the importance of the proposed actions, nor on the impacts of their lack. Such precariousness can contribute to compromise the critical evaluation and effectiveness of already established actions and strategies.

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